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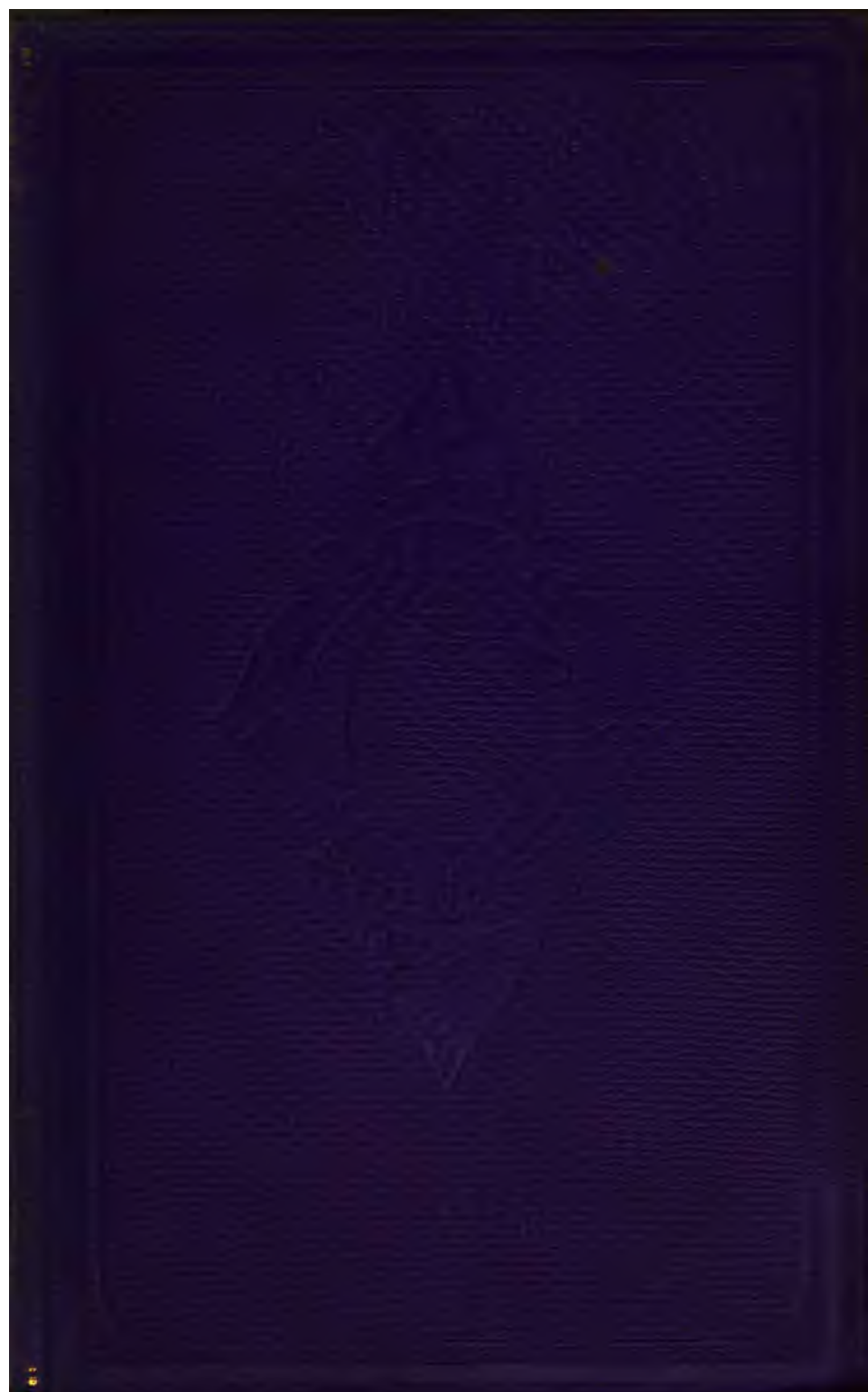
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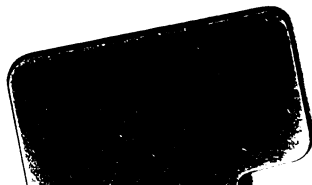
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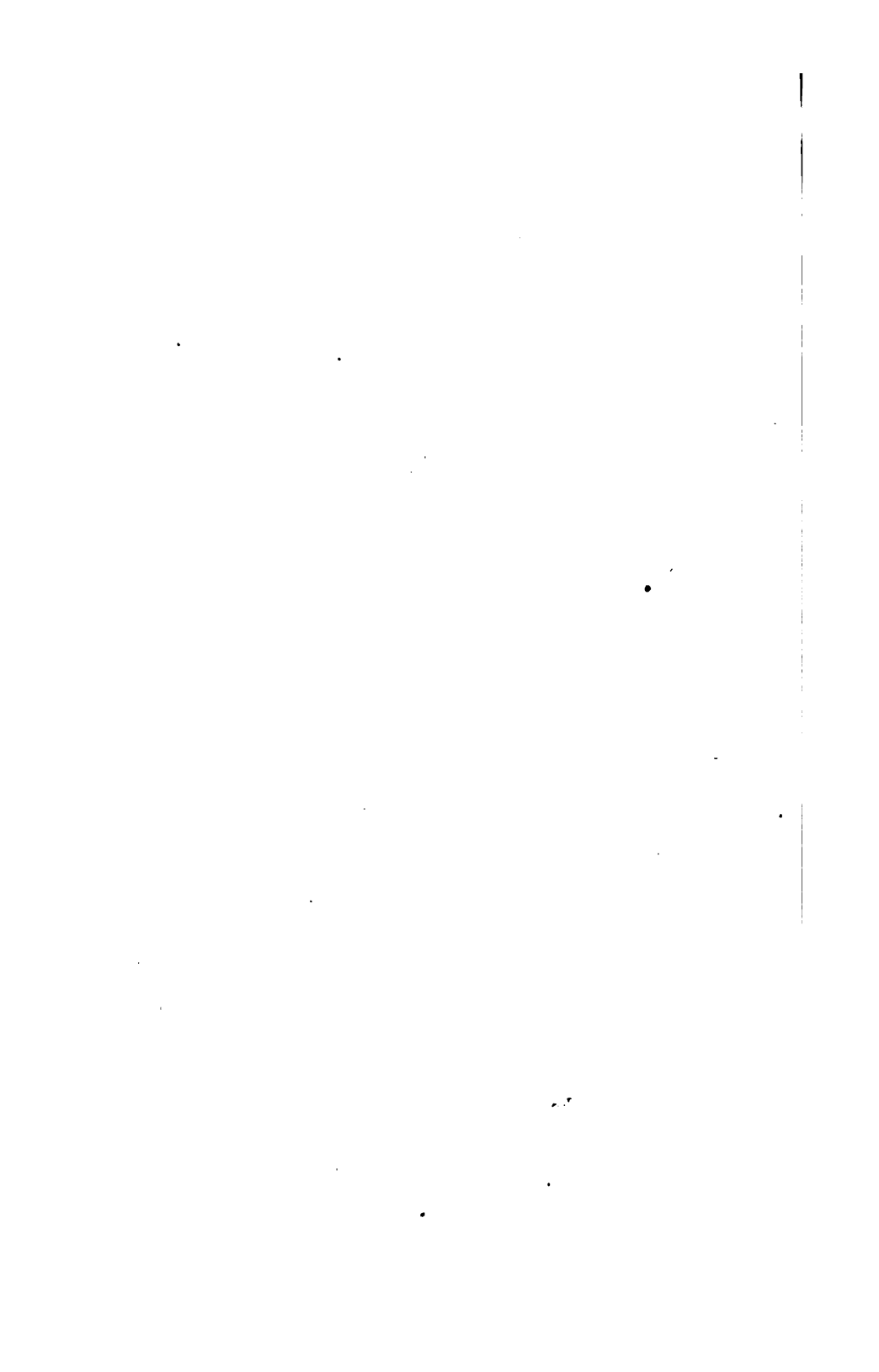




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# A GREAT SENSATION.

BY

EDWARD HENEAGE DERING,

AUTHOR OF "LETHELIER."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# A GREAT SENSATION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### POST-NUPTIAL COMMENTARIES.

SCENE: A boudoir within the farther drawing room at Mrs. Grahame's house. *Time*: Two o'clock p.m. on the wedding-day. *Interlocutors*: The Dowager Lady Ravensdale, Lord Sevenoaks, and Sir John Campion. Distant echo of the friendly chorus: "Boo-hoo!"

*Sir John Campion.* "What has become of the other sister? I've not seen her since we left the church. There's something remarkable about her. I remember remark-



ing it particularly when I went to luncheon at what's-the-name-of-their-place; and it's much more striking to-day."

*Dowager Lady Ravensdale.* "She is: she's the most remarkable girl I ever saw—and she's not half developed yet, in any way. She will be beyond measure handsomer than her sister, both in face and figure, by and by; but she's only sixteen, and had bad health during part of her life, and an idiot of a governess that her vulgar mother got hold of, who kept her poking over ill-taught lessons, instead of running about and climbing trees; and so her figure was injured for a time. But you will see what she will turn out before another year is over."

*Lord Sevenoaks.* "Yes; I never saw anyone develop so wonderfully in so short a time. And she has talent, too?"

*Dowager Lady Ravensdale.* "Talent? She has genius and power, such as, in suitable times, would form a heroine of the highest

order. I never yet was mistaken in the character of a girl—it's the one and only talent I possess; and I tell you that she is an extraordinary girl in every way."

*Lord Sevenoaks.* "I have thought so before; only I was afraid of saying too much, for fear I might exaggerate. They are nearish neighbours of ours, in —shire; but one can know little of a girl in the schoolroom."

*Dowager Lady Ravensdale.* "If you never run any greater risk than that of over-stating the fine qualities of that girl, your future career will be a very safe one." *Exit.*

*Sir John Champion.* "That's a settler for you, my boy."

*Lord Sevenoaks.* "Yes, but I don't see that I deserved it."

*Sir John Champion.* "Not just then; but for something else, I've no doubt. She's a wonderfully shrewd, clever woman. I never can make out how it was that she didn't

make Ravensdale turn out something better. He has run through such a lot of money, with so little to show for it. I suppose, though, he'll be wiser now that he has bought his experience—he's too selfish to come to grief.

“ ‘ Quæ virtus et quanta, boni, sit vivere parvo ;  
Nec meus hic sermo est —— ’

It was what my uncle used to tell me when he gave me a shabby tip at school. It's all very well . . . I'm his best man, and I made an ass of myself in a speech, and all that ; but I wish he had been at the devil before he married her. I've a great regard for Ernsford, and I don't like the business at all.”

*Lord Sevenoaks.* “ Nor I. I never was more sorry for anything. The county has lost the best man there was to stand for it.”

*Sir John Champion.* “ Was he going to stand ?”

*Lord Sevenoaks.* “ Yes ; and he threw it

up when this happened ; and I'm very sorry, though it would have prevented my standing myself. However, he wouldn't have held it long, in all human probability, if what I heard this morning is true. I heard that Lord Elfintower's two grandsons have died of the scarlet-fever, at a private tutor's. Now their father has been dying some time, the grandfather is past ninety, and Ernsford is the next heir ; so that he must be Lord Elfintower, and probably soon."

*Sir John Campion.* " And about five-and-twenty thousand a year. ' There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now ; if it be not now, yet it will come.' " *Exit.*

## CHAPTER II.

"I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well; they imitated nature so abominably."—*Hamlet*.

AND so thought Caterina Guarini, when she found herself established at Lady Goodwin's, surrounded by an aggregate of ugliness such as had never entered into her inexperienced speculations on men and manners.

Sir John Campion had fulfilled his promise with a scrupulous exactness, in spirit as well as in letter, that puzzled Caterina, and, in some degree, himself. The journey so dramatically begun at the corner of the lane, ended at the London Terminus of the Midland Coast Railway, where he left her,

and getting into a Hansom cab, drove at once to Lady Goodwin's, telling his servant, who was waiting on the platform, that he was to remain with her, and see to her luggage till Lady Goodwin's carriage came for her.

Caterina was becoming more mystified every moment by his manner of acting ; and this order to his servant made her really begin to fear that grief and the excitement of fatigue had caused her mind to wander.

It was not so, however, but as follows :

Caterina's maid had seen her rush wildly upstairs after her interview with Sir John in the library ; and suspecting something from her manner, and from certain rumours, such as always forerun evil, followed her, half curious, half fearful, to observe what she was doing. Suspecting, by her movements, that she was meditating some desperate act, she ran to Sir John, and asked

him what she ought to do. Sir John told her to do nothing at present; but, when Caterina had actually left the house, he called the maid back, and directed her to pack up as much as she could do in the time, and send them on after her to the — station. Sir John and Caterina had to wait three hours at the station for a train; therefore the luggage had come with them, and was now actually before her eyes on the platform.

She caught sight of the boxes, and her cheek flushed hotly. A few hours sooner she would have refused to take them; and even now the struggle was fierce and long between the instinct of self-preservation and the impulse of trampled sensibility goaded by wounded pride. Maternal love turned the scale to the side of reason.

In the meantime Sir John Campion was driving in a Hansom to No. 160, Cadogan Place, where lived Lady Goodwin, of whom,

individually, and in her relation to Sir John; a few explanatory words are here needed.

Lady Goodwin was one of those people who appear to have been fraudulently hired by the devil for the purpose of making Christianity look unattractive.

She was narrow-minded and unsympathising, harsh in feature and in disposition, charitable in purse, uncharitable in mind, well-intentioned and conscientious, but cold and intolerant.

Her intercourse with Sir John was practically limited to a ceremonial visit from him about twice a year, during which periods, of about half-an-hour each, their respective angles were wont to become more acute, their respective prejudices more firmly fixed; she to be more uncharitable in one way, he more uncharitable in another—the better nature of each being hermetically sealed.

Each was self-deceived by means of a



different blazon on the same defensive armour. Each was dogmatic — she ostensibly, he repudiatingly: each disbelieved in the moral worth of those who held contrary opinions — she in a spirit of cruel, cold fanaticism, he in a spirit of cruel, cold, negative philosophy and undistinguishing sarcasm: each was intolerant in religion — she avowedly of all who were not what she called “peculiar Christians,” he, unconsciously, of all religion. In brief, during their rare and short interviews, their minds moved in two parallel lines of uncharitableness; and the parallel lines were not those remarkable ones discovered by Dr. Sacheverell — which met in the centre.

The effect of these interviews being stronger and more injurious upon Sir John, in virtue of his stronger intellect and greater susceptibility, he instinctively avoided them, and they gradually diminished in frequency and friendliness; so

that his last visit had measured nearly nine months from the preceding one, and terminated in coolness, not expressed, but understood — not necessary, but inevitable.

Such being the state of affairs, we nevertheless find him now, within a month of his previous visit, calling upon her, at ten o'clock in the morning, to ask a favour of her. Their interview is as follows :

*Sir John* (trying to look glad to see her).  
“ Well, Hester, I'm come upon you early this morning.”

*Lady Goodwin* (raising her right arm from the elbow and extending two fingers).  
“ Hm—How do you do, John? I'm sure I don't know what brings you here.”

*Sir John* (*aside*). “ I wish I could say the same thing — (*aloud*): Well, Hester, are you not glad to see me? I have not been in town, till this morning, since I saw you last.”

*Lady Goodwin*. “ Or during the nine

months before then? This is what you people of the world call speaking the truth. I wish you could have sat under my excellent and talented friend, Mr. Smalleye, last Sunday, and have heard what *he* said about that sort of lies."

*Sir John.* "But, my dear Hester, don't you see, when I called the time before, you blew me up so because I happened to come up from Melton that day. Well, I will come to the point;—I *have* something particular to say, though you mustn't think that I should not have come without."

Lady Goodwin's eyes twinkled a serious twinkle. Sir John proceeded with a degree of haste that might fairly be called precipitate:

"You mustn't think that at all. . . but I know you like to do a good action (by the by, if you have any poor people you want to do something for this winter, I'll give what I can, as far as my own people

leave me free to do so—and they're pretty well off just now). Well, you like to do a good action; and I can tell you of one; quite of another kind, but a very good action it would be. . . Well, the fact is, there is a lady—a foreign lady—an Italian lady, who has been very unfortunate . . . and it really wasn't her fault at all—the fact is, it was —— ”

*Lady Goodwin* (detectively). “ Thank you; you have no occasion to enter into particulars. I can quite understand; and I wonder you can have the face to come to me and talk in this way; but it's just what might be expected from a man whose heart is set entirely upon the vanities of the world, as yours has been ever since you were five years old and your mother left your hair long and curling over your shoulders. What does she want, in case I should be able to do anything for her—that is, supposing she should prove to be

a likely subject ? Does she want a housemaid's place ?”

*Sir John* (colouring). “ Housemaid ! you don't understand me. She's a lady ! and I have no more to do with her than the man in the moon ; but I know all about her, and I wish to be of use to her if I can. Now I can't be of any real use to her without your assistance ; and if you like to take her up, why, you will be doing a really good action — a deal better than shoving those old tracts into people's hands — and that's the long and the short of the matter.”

*Lady Goodwin*. “ I'll waste no more time on a castaway like you, John.”

*Sir John*. “ Is that how you mean to get out of helping Madame Guarini to help herself ? Well, it *would* be harder work than giving tracts and advice (*takes up his hat*). I suppose, then, there's nothing left for it but to go to the other shop, and ask

some one of the other opinions. Let me see—there's Mrs. —— ”

*Lady Goodwin* (hastily). “ And so you would send her to perdition ! Give me her address. Good-bye, John. I can't waste any more time upon you. I have no hope for you . . . By the by, do you choose to give anything to the Papist-extermination Society ; they want to extend their sphere of —— ”

*Sir John*. “ Of brotherly hatred. No, I will not ; but here's a ten-pound note for the poor of the parish ” (placing it on the table). “ Good-bye, Hester.” *Exit*.

No sooner had he left the house than *Lady Goodwin* ordered the carriage and drove to the station. The serious twinkle again came into her eyes at the thought of thus anticipating “ the other shop ; ” but when she began to look at the details of the picture, she found herself labouring with

more anxiety than confidence to make the best of it.

With backsliders of her own particular persuasion she was well prepared to cope; but a foreigner, who had never learnt Dr. Watts's hymns, and probably had never heard of Baxter, was an undertaking for which she had as yet no precedent among the records of her personal experience.

Revolving these things in her mind, she reached the station between the hours of eleven and twelve. Their meeting, which took place on the platform, was painful but scarcely embarrassing, for mental humiliation and physical exhaustion are powerful rhetoricians. A few minutes afterwards she and Caterina drove off together.

Caterina's first day at 160 Cadogan Place was as propitious as the circumstances of the case could warrant. Lady Goodwin was kind, almost sympathising.

The next morning the tracts and advice came down upon her with astounding effect, and such as requires her exact position and general antecedents to appreciate distinctly.

Addresses like the following perplexed her sorely:

"Indeed, my friend, you really must get rid of those worldly curls from your little boy's head, and have his hair cut neatly. Remember how Absalom, the son of David, was suspended from a tree by his hair."

Or the following:—

"I used to know Lady Rossden very well before I was converted, but we never meet now. I have no connection with worldly women like her."

"She was immensely kind to me," said Caterina, who was just beginning to recover a little from the exhaustion of the two preceding days. "I never shall forget her kindness. I wish some one would tell



her so from me — for I can never see her again. If you knew the good she did at Perrington—how she visited the poor, and how much she gave them, of time, and trouble, and money——”

“My friend,” interrupted Lady Goodwin, “that is a carnal way of judging. All the good she does in that way is only a means of wrath, working her own condemnation. Yea, and sudden destruction shall come upon her.”

On requiring to be told why sudden destruction should be so decisively predicted of a person who, religiously and morally, did her duty better than ninety-nine people out of a hundred, she was thus instructed :

“Oh, my friend, you have been following blind guides. Does not Lady Rosden take her daughters to balls, for a snare unto them? Did not the daughter of Herodias dance for a snare unto Herod?”

Exhortations to consider all beauty a snare and a device of Satan—exhortations to admire and revere divers cross, self-sufficient, and otherwise repulsive people, who had harsh voices, supercilious manners, and fat, overlapping lips—exhortations to consider herself as probably foredoomed to everlasting destruction—exhortations such as these, continuous, confusedly crammed with texts, and frequently strengthened by clashing personal applications, soon began to render Caterina's life a burden to her.

Her mental struggles and sufferings at this time are difficult to imagine, and certainly impossible to describe. A deep sense of self-humiliation inclined her to mistrust herself, and gratitude for help in need made her wish to follow Lady Goodwin's advice and opinions; but self-mistrust only uprooted and scattered her previous ideas; it could not make her believe in Lady

Goodwin's, the only effect of whose teaching was hopeless self-reproach, such as must inevitably lead to one of the three following results — insanity, fanaticism, or reaction.

The first tract that Lady Goodwin put into her hands frightened her nearly out of her wits. Its title was, "Steps on the ladder descending to perdition," and its main tendency was to prove that those steps were worn by the feet of beauty blindly fated to eternal damnation.

Reading and hearing nothing but such dogmas, she conscientiously began striving to make herself look ugly ; taking for her models certain Miss Twinbriggles, hard-featured and ungraceful spinsters, who lived at Hammersmith and came to tea. But inasmuch as the pursuance of this purpose caused her to expend on dressing three times as much time and trouble as

she ever did before, she was compelled to abandon the attempt.

Thus Caterina had passed her life since the 17th of November, its even but not smooth tenor being occasionally varied by a walk with the Miss Twinbriggles.

It was on one of these occasions that she met the bridal carriage in Bond Street.

### CHAPTER III.

A SHORT RETROSPECTIVE CHAPTER, FOR THE  
AVOIDANCE OF UNNECESSARY MYSTERY  
TOUCHING THE PRESENT FATE OF ERNSFORD.

WHEN he left Carlsbad, his intention was to reach Ernsford Court as soon as possible, remain there two or three days, to arrange his affairs, and then set out alone for the East; but, as the reader may remember, he was detained at Cologne by a brain fever, the inevitable consequence of the enormous pressure of will that he had brought to bear upon his own feelings.

In about ten days, being just able to move with the help of much resolution, he travelled slowly to England, and arrived

at Ernsford Court on the sixth day, driving up before the old gatehouse at seven o'clock in the evening, as he had done just five weeks before.

Spaces, of time have no limit to their power of containing events.

As five weeks before, his brother was waiting in the courtyard to receive him.

The scene was a curious one. Rupert's countenance was lowering—almost savage, but the tears came into his eyes as he took Edgar's hand. They walked in silence into the old gallery, when the following conversation took place:

*Edgar.* "I thought you were to be at Perrington?"

*Rupert.* "So I was; but I sent an excuse—of course I did. I sent it this morning—I only heard two days ago that you had left Carlsbad, and how and why you had left . . . and the whole infernal story . . . I never expected much good from them—

but when I read the letter, I thought I had gone mad—what I read was so outrageously improbable. I'll never believe any woman again—or man either, except you; but if ever I come across that sneaking blackguard, Ravensdale ——”

*Edgar.* “You would put yourself in the wrong, and do no good to anyone. He has done what any man of the common type would do; he broke no confidence—no faith with me, for I don't know him.”

*Rupert.* “Well, you *must* let me feel that I'll break his head the first time I meet him: I can't think so of a woman—and if I have no safety-valve, I shall be dangerous to go about. . . . I met Rushton this morning at Moorfield; and he had the impertinence to say that you had behaved badly to the people who asked you to stand, by declining so late—his words were, ‘three days after you had got back to Carlsbad—and having virtually promised before you

went.' I don't think he quite knew the circumstances. But I lost my temper, and told him that if he didn't make the best of the way out, I should kick him downstairs."

*Ernsford.* "I'm very sorry you did so; he had a perfect right to feel aggrieved, not knowing the circumstances."

*Rupert.* "Well, Mr. Grahame made it up."

*Edgar.* "I wish you wouldn't be so impetuous; you'll get yourself into serious trouble some day. I have a right to advise you on the subject, for I have so lately experienced the temptation myself: it was by the mercy of God that I did not commit murder . . . when I met him riding with . . . Rupert, I shall go mad if I let myself dwell upon that scene . . ."

*Rupert.* "You don't mean that you still feel with regard to her as . . .?"

*Edgar.* "I do—and always shall. Rupert,



I tell you that Othello's occupation's gone. It's useless to argue on such things."

*Rupert.* "I see it is—curses upon them all! But, for God's sake, try to get over it. If any harm happens to you, I shall go to the bad—I'm certain I shall; I believe in no one else. Edgar, you *must* exert yourself. . . . If any harm happens to you, I verily believe murder will be committed."

*Edgar.* "You make too much of me, and too little of others. You will find people to believe in, if you search for them, —at least as much as any child of man may be believed in; but the longer you live the more you will find that the only way of remaining trustworthy is to mistrust yourself continually. Here have I been preaching self-restraint to you; and the very first opportunity I had of practising it I lost all command over myself! . . . When I met them riding (I can't tell you any more about it now—it would drive me mad)—but the

devil seemed to come into me then ; and but for a chance interruption, I know that I should have had him by the throat, and being beside myself, and stronger than he, I must have killed him."

*Rupert.* "I wish you had."

*Edgar.* "If you wish to show your affection for me, you will do two things — search for the good that is in other people, and be always endeavouring to restrain yourself. You do put more force upon yourself than most people — than almost anyone of your age ; but your power is greater, and your work harder than theirs."

*Rupert.* "It's all very well, but I know what you are, how you have acted in this matter, and how you have been treated. I see you here before me, looking more dead than alive, and only keeping up at all by sheer pluck ; and you ask me to restrain myself. I can't — and that's the end of it."

*Edgar.* "I know of no harm that can

happen to me worse than has happened already — at least none that would not be my own fault. I believe that I have too much vitality left in me to be killed by this. I have passed through such horrible agony of mind, and suffered so much more in every way, during the last three weeks, than I could have conceived to be possible, that, being still alive, and able to take care of myself, I see no reason to suppose that I am going to die yet."

*Rupert.* "What do you mean to do? You can't remain here, with the risk of ——"

*Edgar.* "I shall leave England at once, and think where I am going to afterwards."

*Rupert.* "I won't go back to Oxford: I'll throw the whole thing up sooner than leave you to go off alone as you are."

*Edgar.* "If that's the case, you will force me to remain here. I will never consent to

your losing one single term. I shall do very well; you have seen the worst of me. You can join me next long vacation, if I am still out of England."

Rupert turned away, grieving as one of his peculiar idiosyncrasy and antecedents alone could grieve for the sorrow of that moment.

On the 1st of October he returned to Oxford, and his brother landed at Calais.

## CHAPTER IV.

"No digo yo que será  
Cuerdo ; solo digo yo,  
Que lo rebelde tal vez  
Hace su efecto mayor."

*Calderon.*

Two years and three months had passed since Edith's marriage, and various things had happened during the interval, four of them deserving especial notice in this place, viz. that Constance had fulfilled the Dowager Lady Ravensdale's predictions; that Mrs. Grahame had shaken off the slapping fine woman; that Lord Rossden's butler had not since "heard her ladyship asking of them;" and that Mr. Grahame had become more or less reconciled to everything

except the bluffness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins.

That Mrs. Grahame, after one season's experience, should have made the most of her advantages, was to be expected.

The woman who could make her daughter break off her marriage with a man she loved, influencing her so that she did not perceive the influence—who, in furtherance of this, could send her husband searching for a non-existent ruin, with a bluff lady, then make him apologise for suspecting it; and, finally, make him feel obliged to her for sending him altogether out of the way—who could do all this without noise or blame, and make a cat's-paw of the Griffin on her own ground—the woman who could do this, as Mrs. Grahame had, was likely to “get on,” as soon as she had learnt to see her way; and she had done so.

That Constance should have fulfilled the Dowager's predictions, is a result not un-

warranted by the previous accounts of her; at any rate she had done so.

That the bluntness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins should have rankled in Mr. Grahame's mind, after all the other wounds received at that period were healed, may be accounted for without diving very deep into the mysteries of human nature. All female snubbing hits a blow to a man's self-esteem, such as no other snubbing can possibly do; but who shall adequately describe the steady, repelling, silent snubbing of a stupid woman? It galls in a manner peculiar to itself; the snubbee's feelings are like a wound kept open by a seton.

It was a moonlight night in the merry month of May 18—; the fat sparrows had gone to roost in the squares, and the cats were roaming over the house-tops. There were signs of revelry at No. 100, Grosvenor Square: music, lights, awnings and linkmen evidenced a ball at Mrs. Grahame's.

Proceeding upstairs, two remembered yet altered faces strike one's attention at different ends of the room. One is that of a young, golden-haired, married woman, who seems, as it were, to move in an atmosphere of luxuriance—it is Lady Ravensdale, *née* Edith Grahame; the other is that of a girl in her second season, whose present appearance will require special notice—it is Constance.

The acute Dowager's prediction respecting her had been strictly verified, to the astonishment of all but three people, who, differing extremely in idiosyncrasy and antecedents, possessed each some quality by which to see and foresee her more or less correctly. These three were Edgar Ernsford, Lord Sevenoaks, and Sir John Campion; but Ernsford only had either the means or capacity to do so at the time when the reader first saw her in the school-room at Moorfield.



She was then suffering in almost every way possible, for a girl of fifteen surrounded by so many real and apparent advantages. She was, in fact, tortured by cramping—her physical and mental development was cramped by want of exercise and by hanging over a writing-table, elaborately confusing her mind with lessons ill-taught because ill-adapted to an exceptional and original mind; her moral development was cramped by snubbing, such as would have been of incalculable service to Lady Julia Perringston and the jerky sisterhood who shake hands with a single transverse pull, and put on their hats, sloping foreheadwards, from the back of the head.

And since the religious self ever suffers secondarily from the causes which embitter the moral self, and since faith in things human has a terrible influence on faith in things divine, it is no exaggeration to say that she was then in a state of thorough

stagnation, out of which a few kind words from Ernsford first roused her.

How she advanced, sometimes standing still, but never falling back, has been seen up to the period of her sister's marriage: it remains to be seen what she is now.

Apparently altered — really developed; then like a young oak tree, choked by overhanging shrubs — now like the same tree exposed equally to the air, the sun and the tempest.

In three years her mind has made extraordinary progress. She is well read, without pedantry; accomplished, without eccentricity; religious, without that harsh self-reliance which too often is unconsciously felt and manifested by those who have worked out their own belief from chaos.

In the two years elapsed since her sister's marriage, her physical self has gone through the same process of apparent alteration and

real development as her moral self. Her figure has expanded into proportion; her manner has softened into gracefulness; the former sallowness of her complexion has warmed into a chastened brilliancy; the overmarked features have fallen into harmony with the other component parts of her whole self.

The "ugly duck" has proved to be a swan, and is sailing gracefully along the stream of life; her individuality acknowledged and understood, up to a certain impassable point, by her mother, with whom she now most respectfully holds her own.

Scattered about the rooms are several of Mrs. Grahame's Carlsbad friends, among whom Baron von Platschfusz, who has just published a third edition, with copious notes, of his "*Commentary on the Sylloge Scriptorum qui de linguæ Græcæ vera et recta pronuntiatione commentarios reliquerunt*;" Count Schönbeck, who seems to ignore Lord Ravensdale's existence as

much as he had formerly ignored Ernsford's—so diligent is he in endeavouring to obtain and retain Edith's notice ; and the Griffin, who has not yet forgiven Mrs. Grahame for having made her a cat's-paw.

Within a few yards of each other are standing or moving the acute Dowager, Edith, Lord Sevenoaks, Sir John Campion, and subsequently one or two others. Among them pass the following conversational fragments :

*Lord Sevenoaks.* "I met him by chance this morning: he was only to be an hour or two in town."

*Sir John.* "How did he look?"

*Lord Sevenoaks.* "Very much changed, but hardly as much as I should have expected from all I had heard."

*Sir John.* "'*Tempus edax rerum*,' may be said, objectively and subjectively, in reference to a great sorrow; for if, within a widely margined period, it does not kill the

sorrower, it will seize the sorrow itself by the throat, and slowly press the life out of it. But the worst of it is, that the margin is often wide and the destroyer sometimes appears to waver between the two victims ; so that the final result can by no means be predicted with reliable correctness."

*Edith* (half stopping as she sweeps by).  
"What are you philosophising about, Sir John?"

*Sir John Campion.* "It was only in reference to the fact that the South Eastern Railway has to-day brought the body of your cousin Ernsford from Folkestone to London, and the ——"

*Edith* (utterly losing her self-possession).  
"Great God! it can't be true — Why do you tell me so? . . . I always hated you!"

*Sir John Campion.* "I beg ten thousand pardons for having shocked you ; but you wouldn't hear me out to the end of the

sentence: the fact is, I once lived abroad for two years, and I've got a jumble of idioms in my head, so that I can't speak any language properly. I meant to say that the South Eastern Railway brought his body ——"

*Edith* (in a low, trembling, concentrated tone). "Is this like a man?"

*Sir John Campion* (seeming not to hear her). "Not in a coffin — in a first-class carriage."

*Exit* Edith, precipitately, in the direction of an empty boudoir. Enter a young gentleman, whose name is unknown to "our own correspondent."

*Anonymous young gentleman*. "Lord Elfintower's dead."

*Sir John*. "Are you sure of that?"

*Anonymous young gentleman*. "To be sure I am. I've just seen a man who came up from ——"

*Sir John* (impatiently). "Well, well: if

you know it for a fact, there's an end of it."

*Anonymous young gentleman* (standing languidly, his hands impocketed, his eyes staring full and round—copious of pretentious emptiness). "The present man's rather a muff, ain't he? I met him last year at Rome. I don't think much of him?"

*Sir John* (in a distinct undertone). "Or of anything else. I verily believe you. If you'd talk as little as you think, there would be a great reduction in the aggregate of nonsense."

*Exit Anonymous young gentleman.*

*Lord Sevenoaks*. "An insufferable boy, that. Those are the sort of fellows that go about now—a precious lot they are. They're enough to make one keep out of London altogether, if I didn't hate being here at the best . . . That boy thinks he's to lay down the law to every one just as he likes. He wants snubbing."

*Sir John.* "And will have it before he's much older, if I live and do well (*in a low voice*).

"Il dit qu'il a bien plus d'esprit que moi  
Qui comme on voit en a bien plus que toi."

*Constance* (passing by on the arm of a waltz-partner). "Et puisqu'on le voit, à quoi bon le répéter? No one is more alive to the fact than he is himself."

*Sir John* (looking convincingly apologetic, and watching her musingly as she disappears in the crowd):

"Sunt quibus in satirâ videar nimis acer, et ultra  
Legem tendere opus' —

"There are plenty to whom I appear so; but no one else ever contrived to make it appear so to me."

*The acute Dowager* (coming upon him suddenly, with her treble-acted eyes and ears and her smooth dignity). "This is the first time I ever saw you set down, Sir John."



*Lady Julia Perrington* (throwing herself back over her left shoulder in passing by on the arm of a waltz-partner). "How very jolly! I'm so glad you've been set down. Who has been selling you?"

*Sir John* (with an expression of mock humility):

"Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he,  
Sez Atherton here  
This is gettin' severe  
I wish I could dive like a loon, sez he."

Re-enter *Mrs. Grahame*: *Sir John* continues: "I've just heard some news, *Mrs. Grahame*—some news that will interest you very much, as it concerns your cousin."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "I'm sure we are most anxious about him. Is he going to be —?"

*Sir John*. "He is already —"

*Mrs. Grahame*. "You don't say so! And how did it happen?"

*Sir John.* "Jaundice."

*Mrs. Grahame* (stopping short in her onward movement). "What do you mean?"

*Sir John.* "Well, I was told so a day or two ago."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "But what has that to do with his marriage?"

*Sir John.* "Nothing at all: it refers to his death."

*Mrs. Grahame* (approximating her eyes and pocket-handkerchief reciprocally). "What a dreadful thing! I never was so shocked. I wouldn't have had this ball — I — Boo-hoo!"

*Sir John.* "I'm very sorry I mentioned it; but I had no idea that you were so intimate with the late Lord, as to —"

*Mrs. Grahame* (not quite sure how to take the above). "I'm sure I don't know whom you are referring to, for my part. Poor dear Edgar — Boo-hoo!"

*Sir John.* "Well, poor fellow, he was very unfortunate, and had very heavy trials."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "But to think he's gone — Boo-hoo!"

"I'm astonished to find you so much interested in the late Lord."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Well, one's interested in so many . . . friends, you know: but who do you mean?"

*Sir John.* "Lord Elfintower."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "What the last between —? Then dear Edgar is alive and well? Boo-hoo!"

*Sir John.* "Yes, as far as I know. I couldn't make out what it was that distressed you. Ernsford will get, to my knowledge, five-and-twenty thousand a year, clear, with the title, besides a hundred and fifty thousand pounds ready money . . . By the by, why isn't Ravensdale here to-night? I didn't see him either the other day at

——" (*Exit Mrs. Grahame, oppressed by a jostling crowd of feelings.*)

\* \* \* \*

*Time:* 4.20 a.m. Mr. and Mrs. Grahame and Constance standing in a thorough draught. Above, there are wax candles guttering or extinguished—below, smooth, empty boards and tenantless rows of seats. At the extreme ends of two large rooms are balconies tented and beflowered, through which a cold morning breeze and equally cold morning sunlight encroach steadily. Mr. Grahame advances towards one of the windows, and looks steadily ahead as far as the awning, which limits his vision but not the sturdiness of his gaze. Mrs. Grahame walks quickly up to the spot, with a view to ascertaining the object and course of his survey. Constance stands midway between the balcony and the nearest door. Their post-festal remarks run thus:

A GREAT HISTORY

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THE HISTORY

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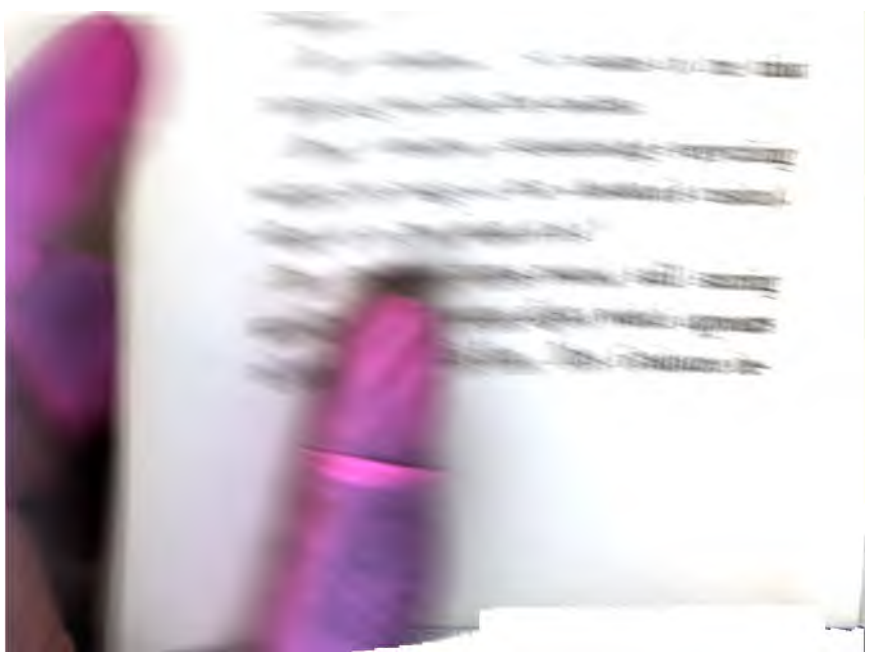
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gins to suspect that the object is in his mind's eye. Constance retires a few paces, and stands observantly. Mr. Grahame scratches his right whisker sharply, and repeats, "I should think there was plenty the matter."

*Mrs. Grahame* (conscious-clear of any transparent diplomacy). "So you have said a great many times. But what? Can't you say what it is, without being all day about it?"

*Mr. Grahame*. "Why can't you see it, now?"

*Mrs. Grahame* (looking up quickly at the opposite wall). "Perhaps that Claude is hung a little too much that way?"

*Mr. Grahame*. "Claude who? Too much what way? I don't know anything about your trumpery dancing men."

*Mrs. Grahame* (moving rather precipitately towards the door). "Then why didn't you explain what you *did* mean?"

*Mr. Grahame* (following up her retreat).  
“ Well, it's this—all your tricks have turned out nohow — that's what they've done. You might just as well not have made Edith break her engagement, and cut up Edgar so that he's never been any good since (*exit* Constance) and turn all Carlsbad inside out, and send me sprawling after a ruin with that Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins (who was as bluff as she could be all the time) and do all kinds of mischief to everybody ; for if you'd have acted properly, it would have been to your own advantage — it would have answered your own purpose a deal better. The money that was sunk in Ravensdale's debts would have produced interest by paying off several of Edgar's mortgages—set that down in your calculation, and stick it on the wrong side. It makes a very pretty sum, indeed ! If your father, that you talked so much about when you didn't want her to marry Edgar, could

see that, wouldn't he make a wry face about it? And Edith's as unhappy as she can be; didn't I tell you it would be so? Why, the blackguard didn't even show himself here to-night. It was so marked a thing, that every one noticed it; and he's never seen with her at all, any where; and you *must* see how things are now. But wait a bit; for it's quite a judgment upon you—I'll be hanged if it isn't! Lord Elfintower died yesterday—you never expected that Edgar had a chance of *that*, because there were three lives between him then. Well, he *is* dead, however, and Edgar is in as good a position as the other fellow; in fact, better in some respects, when you consider what he is, and what he's capable of doing, and what he would have done, if he had represented the county, instead of your upsetting everything. And what he'd be now, and what he'd do now, with his present cards, and all that sort of



thing; and I should like to know what the devil you've gained by all this?"

*Mrs. Grahame* (disappearing through the nearest doorway). "Boo-hoo!"

*Mr. Grahame* (incredulous of his own success, and remorseful for the final result). "God bless me! I didn't mean that."  
*Exit*, scratching his right whisker.

## CHAPTER V.

*Rom.* Courage, man! the hurt cannot be much.

*Mer.* No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough.

*Romeo and Juliet.*

REPORT had, as it not unfrequently does, preceded the event. Ernsford was not Earl of Elfintower till forty-eight hours after Mrs. Grahame's ball, nor had he then any immediate expectation of being so. His arrival in England at that time was a purely accidental coincidence. The facts are these: Finding it necessary to pass a short time at Ernsford Court, after an absence of two years and nine months, he had come to England for that purpose, landing

at Folkestone on the morning of Mrs. Grahame's ball, and proceeding home the same day. Two days afterwards, Lord Elfintower, being in a state of health eventually hopeless, died prematurely of an acute disorder. This event, and its consequences, detained Edgar in England, and brought him with his brother to London towards the end of May—to the extreme satisfaction of Mr. Grahame, who blocked up half the pavement when he met them in St. James's Street, grasping both Edgar's hands simultaneously, and asseverating with diverse playful imprecations, his own pleasure at seeing him again.

"How are you, my boy?" said he. "How have you been all this while? If I ever was so glad to see any one as I am to see you, may I never have another day's fox-hunting, and may Constance marry one of those foreign rascals! You *must* come and dine with us—both of you; there's no one

but ourselves ; we're not going out until the evening. I haven't seen you, Rupert, this year and a half. They tell me you're no end of a fellow to sing and do all manner of things since you went abroad ; by Jove, and it's a year since you took such a capital degree, too. And Edgar, you'll be forced into public life now, and setting everybody to rights. I always said you would, if you got a chance: d—n Carlsbad ! Well, you'll dine with us, won't you ? Half-past seven—it's nearly seven now. Come at once—will you ?”

“ It's very kind of you,” said Rupert, in a tone ill calculated to render the assertion reciprocal. “ It's very kind of you ; but the fact is, it's quite impossible, for we've so much to do.”

His objections, however, were overruled by the only human power that had ever moved him : he gave in with an ill grace. Mr. Grahame walked briskly home, solilo-

quising the while in curt sentences, like the following:—

“Very glad—very glad to see him again.  
. . . . Very much altered though. . . .  
I wonder what Jemima thinks of herself  
now. . . . Deuced unfortunate. . . .  
I feel very much cut up on Edith’s account.  
. . . . Bad business altogether. . . .  
Can’t make out Rupert, though. . . .  
Don’t think much of him. . . . Surly  
fellow—surly fellow!”

Brisker and brisker was his step as he neared Grosvenor Square; greater his pleasure at Edgar’s return; smaller his displeasure at Rupert’s surliness.

If his joy was increased by any feeling neither expressed, nor definitely self-acknowledged—if the sudden exultation of a weak mind over a stronger gave a false weight to the feeling he expressed—if, in short, good was quickened by interspersed evil, how many amongst us can stand up and

say, "My conscience is unpolluted by such meanness?" When such a man is found, and deputed to be the sole critic of public men, then, I trow, we shall be able to say, for the first time, that we have got the right man in the right place.

A little after half-past seven Mr. Grahame entered the drawing-room, dressed for dinner. He looked out of the window with a beaming countenance, and spoke thus, in a cheerfully communicative voice, to Mrs. Grahame:

"Well, Jemima, whom do you think I saw just now?" (A knock is heard at the hall door.) "God bless me, why here they are!"

*Mrs. Grahame* (anxiously). "Who are here? I didn't know. . . . Did you ask anyone? I—I think you *might* have told me. It's—it's very unpleasant; it may be *anyone*. I really think you *might* have told me. . . . It's—it's impossible to know—

how should I? It's—it's—it's not fair. I really do think you *might* have told me."

*Mr. Grahame.* "Well, you see, my dear, I beg your pardon; but the fact was, I only met them just now; and I told you as soon as I could find you. I couldn't find you when I came in. You see, I was in that sort of position that I could not exactly help myself. I couldn't do otherwise than I did. I had no choice, don't you see? I told you as soon as ever I could ——"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "But you *don't* tell me, and here they are; they'll be in the room in another instant. It's—it's—it's a *little* too bad. . . . I—I really *do* think it is." This highly exciting scene was brought to a close by the butler, who opened the door wide, and announced—

"The Earl of Elfintower: Mr. Ernford."

A person who had prompted her own daughter, and made her affiliate the promptings—who, in a German watering-place,

had broken off a marriage without causing scandal—who had converted an intriguing lady into a cat's-paw, and made a bluff lady toil wearily from ten till three in search of a ruin, was not likely to be long regaining her presence of mind. Mrs. Grahame's discomfiture lasted just half a minute after the butler's announcement.

The present seems a fitting moment to inquire what two years and nine months had done for the brothers.

To Edgar it had done much, constructively and destructively.

Sorrow had developed a fine nature, but shaken a fine constitution—shaken it to its centre. The training had been too severe, and the weaker of the two strong component parts had given way: the soul had been trained into greater excellence, but the body had, in a certain sense, broken down. Its exterior strength was not apparently diminished, nor its interior power of



endurance lessened ; but its vital force was undermined, its vital resisting vigour reduced.

To Rupert the two years and nine months had also done much, constructively and destructively ; but the causes and effects had been altogether different. Ability, industry and opportunity had made him a scholar and an artist ; exercise and a well-made body had made him an athlete ; natural veneration and contributive intercourse had made him a Christian, in spite of the obstacles that an eager, speculative intellect and an unmanageable idiocracy placed in his way.

One thing only had operated as a moral and religious drag — his brother's fate was that thing. His brother's fate suspended his brother's influence over him — filling up the vacant space with a sort of combative sympathy that threatened to dege-

nerate into morbid resentfulness, and render the whole tone of his mind unhealthy.

The present meeting was necessarily an awkward one for all who composed it. Mrs. Grahame, though retaining her self-possession, experienced a feeling of humiliation such as she had never before experienced or imagined. Mr. Grahame wished alternately that the meeting was over, and that he had not effected it without warning. Rupert writhed under the torture of suppressed resentment. Edgar was in the position of a wounded man whose bandages have been suddenly torn off.

In a few minutes Constance entered the room, bringing curiosity and admiration to the relief of embarrassment. Since Edgar had last seen her, two years and nine months had rolled over her life, marking their passage in a manner that surpassed even his large expectations of her. For a

few seconds he forgot his own personal identity in absorbed attention.

It was still longer since Rupert had seen her — longer by a year or more. He could scarcely recognise her; but he was by nature an artist and a poet, and he felt strangely fascinated. To him she was not her former self developed, but another creation — a beautiful stranger. When he last saw her she was a sallow, weird-like child, who never could learn anything, and had a figure like a wooden doll. It was natural enough that he should scarcely recognise her now.

As she came into the room she gave one quick-searching glance at Edgar, and tears welled suddenly into her dark, translucent eyes. Her presence rather increased the awkwardness of the scene, further description of which is needless—it being evident that reserve and its effects on indifferent conversation are words which carry their

own description with them — and a very dull description it is.

The first thing that broke its monotony was the post-prandial separation of sexes, in accordance with that highly civilised custom by which we literally “show the door” to the ladies, and (*horresco referens*) not unfrequently, open the door to conversation inadmissible in their presence — passing from the scene of unchivalrous self-indulgence into the presence of sisters, daughters, wives and affianced wives.

It is scarce necessary to add, that the above does not describe the present case.

Never had Mr. Grahame opened the drawing-room door for his wife with such deliberate solemnity as on the present occasion; never shut it with so much reluctance. He had exhausted his stock of neutral remarks in St. James’s Street, and every subject that now occurred to him seemed

either to tread upon, or verge irrevocably towards forbidden ground.

If Edgar had been alone, it would have been less embarrassing — Mr. Grahame felt that instinctively. Rupert's countenance made him feel ill at ease, and inclined to say the wrong thing from nervousness, though no one could be more innocent of the evil than he, who had fought several unequal battles to prevent it, and undergone much personal annoyance during the struggle, including his pilgrimage with the bluff lady. He had yet to learn that in social life, as in politics, the individual is made answerable for the party.

He scratched his right whisker, and poured out a very full glass of claret, which he proceeded to sip with inconceivable slowness. This gained him nearly five minutes, but, like all temporary expedients, only delayed the crisis.

The claret finished, and the conversation still in suspense, he drew himself up in his chair, scrutinised the toes of his boots, and said:

“God bless me, yes! to be sure . . . .  
By Jove, now . . . . Parliament . . . . that’s  
the thing, to be sure . . . . I always said  
——”

He incautiously looked up, and saw Rupert’s eyes fixed on him with an expression of contemptuous incredulity.

“Confound the boy!” he muttered, half aloud. “What a surly fellow he’s grown! What the devil had I to do with it, except to kick up a dust and try all I could to prevent it?”

Edgar shook himself out of a painful reverie, and made some general reply to his host’s remark about Parliament. Still the conversation flagged with an awkward distinctness, which Rupert perversely contributed to increase. Mr. Grahame rang

the bell nervously for the coffee, poured out half a glass of sherry, and said, "Hm, ha, yes, I suppose so . . . . I suppose you'll do those repairs at Ernsford, eh? Just so. It'll be a glorious old place to live at then —"

"Only I don't see how it can be possible for him *ever* to live there again:" replied Rupert, in a low hoarse voice.

Mr. Grahame rose suddenly as though a pin had worked itself through his chair; he took out his watch, looked at it without noticing the hour, and said: "Hm, yes, well . . . d—d disagreeable. . . . Shall we go upstairs?"

They left the room, all three vaguely dissatisfied with themselves. Mr. Grahame wondered whether he could anyhow have made events go differently; Edgar felt sorry for not having tried harder to put his host at his ease; and Rupert began to doubt whether his own efforts to produce

the opposite effect were strictly in accordance with the laws of hospitality.

This mild self-reproach was productive of much greater ease upstairs; for it caused Mr. Grahame to disappear on the plea of writing a business letter, and forced upon Rupert's convictions the necessity of mending his manners.

Something stronger than conviction acknowledged the necessity as Rupert entered the drawing-room—it was impulse, born of attraction to beauty of form, colour and sound: the terms are strong, but the subject of them was exceptional.

The drawing-rooms were three in number, and that by which they entered was on one side of, and a little behind the one commonly used, the respective doors being at right angles; so that the entrance of the two brothers was not perceivable in the inner room, whence issued sounds of music.

When the sound of music first reached



his ears, Rupert drew back with a gesture of impatience, and muttered :

"I thought I should at least have escaped this infliction. What a nuisance amateur singing is!"

The impression of the sounds became more distinct. Rupert stood still, and held back his brother by the arm.

"What is it?" said he to himself. "I don't make it out. Who have they got here? Who has she been learning from? What can it be?"

It was this: A full-toned, fresh, mezzo-soprano voice, of a slightly metallic quality, unworked but unusually sympathetic, and managed with an unusual amount of artistic feeling.

"What master, of the present fashion, has had the sense to give her Righini's exercises?" thought Rupert.

Whilst he was mentally soliloquising in this manner the solfeggio ended, and was

succeeded by an *arietta da camera* of the genuine Italian stamp, "benino di buona scuola,"\* and with an unusual amount of sentiment.

Rupert walked softly to the inner door, and placed himself so that he could watch the singer unobserved: he was fairly taken by surprise when he saw that it was Constance.

This discovery made him more intent on observing her closely, or rather, observing her for the first time with unjaundiced eyes. He concealed himself behind the door, again held his brother back, and gazed intently.

It was a case beyond his present comprehension, because he was unprepared and prejudiced. If he had made use of his

\* In apology for twice bringing foreign terms into the text, I must urge the superlegal excuse, necessity—it being impossible otherwise to express exactly the thing signified.

eyes and brains two hours before, he would have perceived that she was beautiful in mind and body, and he would not now have been startled at the new discovery, or thrown off his equilibrium by hearing her communicate a peculiar sympathetic power to a tolerable voice, well but not much taught. Without the help of clairvoyance he might have seen a little further—he might have perceived that the sympathetic expression given to the music was only one small manifestation of genius, of which music was only one small outlet. This was the fact, and was seen by Edgar; but Rupert was not “man enough” to reach the truth without more floundering.

Meanwhile several minutes had passed. Edgar positively refused to stand behind the door any longer—a fact evidenced by the following curt dialogue:

*Rupert.* “Wait a moment now—there’s a good fellow. I want to hear how she ——”

*Edgar.* "No, I won't. We might as well have our ears at the keyhole."

They went into the inner room, and were standing by the pianoforte before Constance was aware of their entrance. She neither started, nor got up, nor did she look over her shoulder, shrugging the same the while—all which courses of action have many precedents. She turned gracefully, and a gentle, even blush suffused her cheek—a blush more lovely than that which Edith had lost for ever at Carlsbad.

Joubert says\*, "Une toile d'araignée faite de soie et de lumière, ne serait pas plus difficile à exécuter que cet ouvrage: qu'est-ce que la pudeur?" And if modesty be a thing so difficult to define in the abstract, what shall we say to the difficulty of understanding its influence in individuals, and tracing its under-currents?

Turning aside from this question, we find

\* J. Joubert, "Pensées, Essais, et Maximes."

events proceeding in the drawing-room as follows: Lord Elfintower had a short but sharp struggle with himself in his respective characters of a guest and a sensitive being; the former representing the necessity of talking to Mrs. Grahame, the latter rebelling violently against it. True it is that he was further advanced in self-mastery than most men — probably more so than any man one would find in a day's journey "from morn to dewy eve;" but he was a man still, and therefore vulnerable to temptation. Whether and what sort of temptation it was that he underwent at that moment, may be fairly guessed by supposing oneself similarly circumstanced. A Chinese work on morality, quoted by De Montesquieu\*, names as one of three severest trials of virtue, that of finding one's enemy about to perish unless one assists him. I cannot help thinking, that to be in the same draw-

\* *Esprit des Lois.*

ing-room with the person who has blasted one's happiness by deliberate intrigue, and will look foolish if not now addressed, is a trial as severe as the Chinese criterion.

The inward struggle terminated in favour of the laws of hospitality. Meanwhile Constance and Rupert were carrying on a fitful conversation. There was an awkward pause at first; Constance waiting for Rupert to begin, and Rupert wondering what had become of the self-possession wherewith he had tormented Mr. Grahame.

"I thought no one was by; you are up early from the dining-room," said Constance at length, rising from the piano.

Rupert's mind wavered between a strong impulse to say something in praise of her singing, and a strong conviction that, if he attempted to do so, he would do it awkwardly. It is needless to add that he finally stumbled upon the latter alternative, which he did thus :

"Yes, I know we came up very soon. I—I came up some time ago . . . but I kept out of the way till you had done singing . . . Yes, how very seldom one hears anything good."

Fortunate for society is the fact, that when a man and a woman are entangled in an embarrassing dialogue, the woman, *cæteris paribus*, preserves her self-possession the longest. The amount of ungraceful floundering prevented by this natural law exceeds calculation.

Constance felt embarrassed, probably as much so as Rupert—it certainly was not his fault if she were not; but she bore her own burden, and removed his.

To how many millions of men has this thing been done by women, not merely for the removal of a temporary shyness, but for the alleviation of heavy and deserved sorrows? To how many living men may we say, in this matter, "Thou art the man?"

In a few minutes Rupert had recovered

the suspended power of saying what he intended to say, which proved to be very different from what he had said at first. Under the gentle mesmerism of beauty, his sympathies began to expand, and the indurated excrescences of his idiosyncrasy to soften: the uncertain angularities of a strong nature untrained, unsatisfied, began to disappear, and his real nature to disclose itself, manifesting, among other variations from previous appearances, instead of awkwardness, grace—instead of self-conceit, unusual modesty.

Lord Elfintower's conversation with Mrs. Grahame soon died out, like a fire laid with sticks and papers only. Within half an hour he walked towards the piano in search of a courteous excuse for leaving the house. As he crossed the room, certain nervous gestures of Mrs. Grahame increased his desire to be on the other side of the front door.

"I think I must be going. I have seve-



ral things to do this evening," said he, turning back to Mrs. Grahame, who looked much relieved by the intelligence.

Simultaneously Constance was asking Rupert to sing; the latter complying at once, and adding, "But you must not expect to hear anything of a voice; I destroyed that by rowing and wading; and I have not made the most of the little I have got. The fact is, that till last year, I had very little time, and no opportunities, for anything of the kind; and when ——"

"Good night, Constance; I am obliged to be off," interrupted Lord Elfintower, coming up quickly.

A window, looking upon the square, was not far from the spot where he stood; so that he could distinctly hear the sequent and consequent sounds of a carriage driving up to the door, and a footman knocking at the same.

"It's very late already," said he, shaking

hands quickly with Constance, and retreating at a pace which left his brother scarcely time to say "Good night," and follow him.

As Rupert started up, Constance's eyes accidentally, and for the first time, threw their light full into his. He hesitated a moment, and said :

"Will you let me come again?— It's a long time since ——"

Before he could finish the sentence, or Lord Elfintower reach the end of the further room, the door opened, and in walked Lady Ravensdale.

The incident may seem stage-like, as the common incidents of every-day life often do; but it was a terrible reality to the two principal actors. Lord Elfintower had known that the trial must come at last, if he ever came back to England; and he had long been schooling himself against the occasion — more particularly since circumstances had forced him to come to London :

but all the self-mastery that ever was achieved could not still the heart's pulses on such an occasion as that.

With the single intermission of a short struggle on her wedding morning, Edith had been slowly deteriorating from the moment when she first gave way to the temptation of making Lord Ravensdale "beg for a dance like all the rest of them;" but it takes a longer period and a quicker rate of deterioration to erase from a woman's heart the unreplaced image of a positive first love. Perhaps the very qualities that made her infirm of right at Carlsbad, and infirm of wrong on her wedding morning, made her the more vulnerable now.

Both were utterly unprepared for the meeting — the more so because they were partially prepared for a future one. Edith stood motionless, colourless and almost stupefied — as on her wedding morning, when she stood before Constance, and said,

"It's very hard, and I'm very miserable."

Edgar looked as he did when he handed her into the carriage on the night of his ill-omened return to Carlsbad: the schooling of nearly three years failed him at the first moment of the first trial. Would perfect consistency in this matter have proved him more or rather less than a man?

Those who possess very strong commonplace faculties, enclosed within a definite line of limitation, and are very positive in the exercise of them, generally show themselves bewildered, more than other people when they chance to be carried beyond the boundaries. Mrs. Grahame was thus circumstanced. After having outwitted every one without apparent effort, almost without change of countenance, she was now bewildered at the sight of that which ought to have entered into her calculations when she sat down to count the cost of the work done

at Carlsbad. She lost her presence of mind, and stared hopelessly.

At the sight of Lady Ravensdale Rupert started back, and the expression of his countenance changed manifestly for the worse; the gentle mesmerism of beauty was dissipated in an instant, and all the morbid feelings which had been in some degree kept down during the last year, started up with a fresh growth.

Constance alone was equal to the occasion.

She came forward so gracefully, that the expression of Rupert's countenance modified as she passed him, and Mrs. Grahame began to recover her presence of mind. Going up to her sister, so as to interpose between her and the rest, she said, in a voice that sounded natural, so strongly was it assumed —

“You are just in time to see the fancy

dress before it is put away ; it was sent half an hour ago."

It is almost unnecessary to say, that before they returned to the drawing-room the brothers had left the house.

## CHAPTER VI.

PASSING over a short space of time and ground, we find the two brothers at home, just seated at the breakfast-table, on which are scattered every sort of missive, written, lithographed and printed, sent by every sort of post and messenger. Newspapers of every political creed, circulars of every description, letters of every kind, from an estimate, written closely over forty pages of foolscap, to a note of invitation to dine at Greenwich, are lying before Lord Elfin-tower, for inspection or reflection. Side by side, in friendly contact, are the *Morning Herald* and the *Morning Advertiser*, the *Guardian* and the *Record*, the *Times* and

the *Morning Star*; appeals to build churches, and appeals to demolish church rates; pamphlets to prove that the world is just emerging from infancy, and pamphlets to prove that it is to end in a year and a half; applications for every conceivable subscription in London, the country and the colonies; applications to uphold every possible opinion, and pay for the promotion of every possible object. Briefly (or the list will extend into the third volume) there is every conflicting appeal to sympathy and purse that can salute the accession of an untried man to wealth and influence.

There is no visible alteration in the brothers since their eventful visit at the Grahames'; each appears to have relapsed into his previous state of mind. After a long spell of the papers before them, Rupert, being the first to become tired of the occupation, opens the conversation as follows:—



*Rupert.* "Here's a note from Lady Rossden, to ask us to dinner next Tuesday."

*Edgar.* "Are you engaged?"

*Rupert.* "No; I keep clear of going out."

*Edgar.* "Then you had better write and accept it for both of us, if you're doing nothing."

*Rupert.* "Well, I suppose so, as they are neighbours . . . But I keep clear of that sort of thing."

*Edgar.* "If you'll take my advice, you will do no such thing."

*Rupert.* "But you generally do so yourself."

*Edgar.* "The cases are different; you are beginning life, and I . . . Seriously, you ought to go more into ladies' society; if you don't, you'll probably find cause to repent it, some day or other."

*Rupert.* "I can't see how. If I were given to what is supposed to be the alternative, well and good; but ——"

*Edgar.* "I think you misapprehend the nature of that same alternative; or, rather, you don't see that there are several contained in that one. Of course, I don't suppose that you would, under any contingency, get into mischief systematically and unlovingly, like those louts who make a parade of their own blackguardism, on horseback and on drags, in Hyde Park, before their sisters—I know you better than that. But there are other and less frequented roads that might lead you into mischief, such as not I, but the world, would think far more heinous than all the openly professed, vaunted and systematic vice represented by these disgraceful exhibitions. If ever you are run away with, it will be by the enthusiasm and chivalrous feeling whose power you now laugh at because it has never yet got a fair pull at you. The fact is, I know by my own personal experience, that one cannot too much mis-

trust the power of one's own resolution against one's own heart. You saw, the other night, how much all my resolutions were worth, though I had been nearly three years looking the truth in the face; and from that fact you may judge what the same amount of self-control, with a little variation of circumstances, would be likely to produce. What I am aiming at is This: the more opportunities a man gives himself of falling in love legitimately, the less likelihood there is of his doing so illegitimately; in fact, every chance he gives himself in one way may be reckoned as so much taken off the other; that is, if he has not defiled his own mind so that it is incapable of receiving a good impression."

*Rupert.* "I see the truth of that clearly: still, I say that I have no inclination either way."

*Edgar.* "You have not been tried yet,

my dear fellow; and there are several reasons why. You did not grow up with a twin-growing attachment, as I did; and the life you led, up to last year, was in every respect antagonistic to the germination of the abstract feeling. Since then, and up to the middle of last month, you have been exclusively devoting yourself to art, with the insatiable thirst of a man who sees a fresh mine of beauty opened before him. You are now beginning life as an actor and a sympathiser; and now the effect of your past life and habits upon your nature will be, to give you tenfold greater capacity of appreciation and enjoyment than most men, but, at the same time, a tenfold greater temptation, if that which is a temptation to you comes in your way."

*Rupert.* "I always wish and intend to follow your advice; I never listen to anyone else, and I have no faith in myself—except in my power of shutting my mind

against the influence of everyone but yourself."

*Edgar.* "Take care that, in your endeavours to shut out a kind of influence which is most unlikely to enter, you don't inadvertently shut out your neighbour's sympathies, and confine your own within so narrow a compass that they, for very lack of breathing-room, open the door to another kind of influence which is likely to enter. You will never do any good by despising other people. If your mind protests against all the fantastic tricks that men play, you will find the men themselves poor objects for powder and shot, and you will at length gladly turn to contemplate the good that is scattered among them, without contempt and without danger of influence."

*Rupert.* "I quite agree with you; my reason always does. I think, on the whole, that I feel better disposed to people in general than I used to be. . . . But the

thing is, old fellow—why is nobody so good as you are? You see it's not altogether my fault; for the fact is, the contrast is too great between you and other people. It's no use—I can't help saying so."

*Edgar.* "If you will believe me—and I have seen and thought and suffered more than you have—you will modify that opinion considerably, even assuming that I am a tenth part of what you think I am. You must bear in mind that you see all the best side of me, whilst of acquaintances, and what are commonly called friends, you generally see the worst—which is made to look even worse than it need, by a clumsy, half-unconscious attempt at concealment."

*Rupert.* "Very true. I feel the truth of all you say . . . People are often, perhaps generally, much better than they seem; but there's no use in trying to persuade me that anyone is as wise and good

as you are—you might tell me so till you were black in the face.”

*Edgar.* “For the present I’ll *lend* you the advantage, though it’s a fallacy. You say what you think of people collectively, and I will say what I know of one in particular. . . . I mean Constance Grahame.”

*Rupert.* “I think she *is* the most attractive girl I have ever seen—but I have seen so few. I had no idea that she would turn out so.”

*Edgar.* “I had—long ago.”

*Rupert.* “How did you contrive to do so, when she was so totally different from what she is now, that I should not have recognised her last Thursday, if I had met her anywhere else?”

*Edgar.* “Very simply. I had five years more experience than you, and saw her frequently, which you did not.”

*Rupert.* “I’m very sure that none of her own immediate family made it out.”

*Edgar.* "I can't help that: I . . . I suppose people don't look so much at . . . No doubt they did see it . . . but you couldn't expect them to talk about it to other people."

*Rupert.* "I don't care: I'm sure they didn't . . . No one did, except yourself."

*Edgar.* "Well, never mind who saw it; the thing is, has it turned out so?"

*Rupert.* "To be sure it has: I've always found you turn out right in what you have said about people, except ——"

*Edgar.* "And the exception is just what ——"

*Rupert.* "Except nothing—the word slipped out without any meaning: I had nothing further to say."

*Edgar.* "Or rather, there was nothing further that you *would* say. I appreciate your motive, my dear Rupert; but the word at which you broke off the sentence reminds me to digress, or rather to go back



for a moment, and say that the exception, which of course refers to . . . to ——”

*Rupert.* “No, it doesn’t.”

*Edgar.* “Yes, it does. Well, either way, it suits my purpose; for if I was utterly deceived, having every possible opportunity of not being so—deceived by *her* uninfluenced self—the fact goes far to prove that one cannot sufficiently mistrust one’s judgment, one’s firmness and one’s self-control, in all matters concerning the woman one loves; and if I was *not* deceived, your implacable resentment is beyond measure unjust—if possible, even more so than I thought it was.”

*Rupert.* “I didn’t want to talk about it; but if I *must* say something—the fact is, that you *were* deceived; it would have been a disgrace to you if you had not been so; it would have looked as if you were conversant with such deceptions. You *were* deceived — there’s no use talking about it;

you were . . . Don't ask me to say anything more about it ; I shall only say what, on your account, I shall be sorry for."

*Edgar* (after a pause). . . . "To return to the point I have been aiming at. You were saying just now that I had proved to be right about Constance ; am I to infer, then, that you will probably have confidence in whatever I may state positively respecting her from my own personal observation ?"

*Rupert*. "Of course I shall ; why do you ask me ? You know that I always have unlimited confidence in your judgment."

*Edgar*. "I know you have, abstractedly, and, generally speaking, practically ; but sometimes it happens that a stout prejudice shoves itself in between the light and one's convictions—we are all of us liable to that ; and I am prepared to encounter the stoutest in your catalogue." (A pause.)

*Rupert*. "Well, the stoutest prejudice

in my catalogue? I have agreed to all you have said about Constance, and I see no reason to suppose that any stout prejudice could interfere with my belief of what you are going to say."

*Edgar.* "Not about her singly; but when it comes to a complex idea ——"

*Rupert.* "*Do* tell me at once, whatever it may be."

*Edgar.* "So I will—bluntly, which is the way in which an embarrassing communication generally forces its way through at last."

*Rupert.* "I can't understand how any communication from you to me can possibly be embarrassing."

*Edgar.* "There is one sort of suggestion which is embarrassing, *per se*, for a man to make to a man — at least, I never could open my mind to any other view of it — perhaps a stout prejudice gets between me and the light; therefore, I may as well

shove through it at once." (A pause.)

"If you can succeed in gaining the heart of Constance Grahame, which I am convinced you can do, you will be just the most fortunate man of my acquaintance."

*Rupert* (hurriedly, and in an excited tone). "Never! It's no use talking about it. Do you think I am going to be mixed up with people who behaved so disgracefully to you? Do you suppose, now, that I would have anything to do with them?"

*Edgar* (trying to smile). "I told you that I should have to run against a stout prejudice; but it will give way if you will be patient."

*Rupert*. "Patient, when I see the effects of their devilries stamped upon your face! Patient, when . . . . Don't force me to go through the long catalogue of evils wrought with unparalleled duplicity and wickedness. It can only have the effect of

burdening my conscience by making me breathe every curse that —— ”

*Edgar.* “Stop, then, before you do so, and listen to reason: it will bind you to nothing. The opposite course can do no good in any way, and is only painful to me. . . . I cannot forget what she once was to me.”

*Rupert.* “I am very, very sorry to have said what was painful to you; I ought to have known that it would be so. I know I am not reasonable on that subject. (A long pause.) The fact is, it comes to this: Let me see you get over the effects of their actions, and then I will listen patiently to whatever you may say in their exculpation.”

*Edgar.* “I am not going to deceive either you or myself; I *have* got over it, as far as I ever shall (don't let yourself loose again — it will only make matters worse). You can't expect me to be what I was before.”

*Rupert.* "It's all very well for you to talk in that cool way about it, as if you didn't care; but I know what it really means, though you don't say it. The fact is, you have lost all pleasure and interest in life . . . . I see that; and yet you ask me to listen patiently to all sorts of inconclusive exculpations of the people who have brought you to this."

*Edgar.* "How do you know that they are inconclusive, when you have not heard them?"

*Rupert.* "I know pretty well what they *must* be, by knowing very well what they *can't* be."

*Edgar* (looking at his watch). "Whatever they may be, I must postpone them, or I shall not have time to say what is much more important — for I must be at Lincoln's Inn within three-quarters of an hour. But are you prepared to listen, and

not only to listen, but to suspend your prejudices, feelings and opinions?"

*Rupert.* "I am."

*Edgar.* "Without interruption by word or thought?"

*Rupert.* "Yes."

*Edgar.* "In the first place, then, you must not only acquit Constance of all blame in the matter, but you must go a step farther, and admire her for taking, as she did, a very decided line of conduct, such as was nothing less than marvellous in a girl of fifteen, snubbed as she was at the time, and ignorant of everything but what her own heart and genius taught her. I am going to tell you now what I would have told to no one else without her permission — and not to you, but that I am persuaded I can benefit you both by doing so. Three years ago, on the morning when the Grahames first went to London, Constance rode over to Ernsford Court by

herself at seven o'clock in the morning, and opened the subject to me — taking upon herself the burden of all the misapprehensions likely to arise from such a step. Neither you nor I have time now for further details; but I tell you that, to my certain knowledge, she risked and sacrificed a great deal in endeavouring to prevent . . . . what happened . . . . I know that from . . . . and I am morally certain that she did a great deal more. In conclusion, I have only to say this — and a very delicate and disagreeable thing it is to say — but I *must* say it:

“I am convinced that, if you will give yourself and her the opportunity, you will be repaid by a mutual attraction, such as neither will find elsewhere. I am convinced that she is the woman whose influence will cause you to excel. Finally, I am convinced that you will never do any good till you are under her influence. I



would rather that you would give me no answer to this now — only think about it in the same spirit in which, I believe, you have listened to me."

*Rupert.* "I will do so. I promise you to do it. You certainly have most completely exculpated her (aside) and inculpated her sister."

*Edgar* (with an unconscious gesture of impatience). "Say anything you like, except that. I mean — say any and every conceivable thing of everybody, but let *her* alone . . . . you understand me, and don't take it unkindly?"

*Rupert.* "I do: it was my fault . . . . I begin to understand the sort of feeling you mean."

*Edgar.* "Are you coming with me? I don't know that there's anything particular for you to do. I shall be back before two o'clock."

*Rupert.* "I was thinking that I ought

to call on the Grahames. It's very rude of me not to have been there since . . . . It's nearly a week ago."

*Edgar* (in a decisive tone). "Very rude, indeed, I should say . . . . not quite gentlemanlike ; in fact, you really *ought* to go." *Exit* Rupert.

Scarcely had Rupert left the room, when a note was brought in with the accompanying information that a servant was waiting for an answer. The note was in a handwriting recognisable, but much altered since he had last seen it. The letters were larger, and less round. It ran as follows :

"I have been hoping every day to meet you somewhere, and, failing to do so, I write this scrawl, which I have hardly courage to send. It would be some alleviation of the bitter remorse which never leaves me for an instant, if I could once hear from your own lips that you forgive me. Can you refuse to do so ? I shall be

at home to-day between three and four.

— EDITH."

Which is the most advisable exercise for a strong will — resistance or avoidance? If the abstract question were put to the vote, it is probable that a large majority would declare in favour of the latter. But if to each individual comprising that majority the question were put, "Do you conscientiously believe that, if in Lord Elfin-tower's place, you would have refused to see Lady Ravensdale?" I trow the figures would be different.

## CHAPTER VII.

HALF an hour afterwards, Lord Elfintower and Rupert were on their way respectively to Lincoln's Inn and Grosvenor Square. The former was on matters purely technical: it is well nigh impossible to say what the latter was, for no one knew less than the visitor himself, as he acknowledged to himself whilst taking a very circuitous route to his destination.

Abstractedly, this vagueness of purpose savours not a little of eccentricity and its twin brother, irresolution; but in Rupert's case it did not proceed from either. He was not properly eccentric, though he some-

times acted eccentrically. He was really firm, though he sometimes seemed to act irresolutely. In both respects the apparent resemblance took its rise in the neutral ground that lies between the essential and the incidental.

Disproportion and discordance being the approximate causes of mental eccentricity, it follows that any incidental causes which may derange the relations between the component parts must produce incidental eccentricity; and as squatters obtain a freehold right to their land by reason of their squatting, and as acute disorders sometimes become chronic in the same manner, *i.e.* by long and undisturbed possession, so in eccentricity the incidental will now and then take root, and assume all the characteristics of the essential. But there is an intermediate point where the characteristics are assumed, whilst the thing they represent has not taken root; and this point Rupert

had reached—a very dangerous point for a man of two-and-twenty—dangerous in more ways than one.

Preceding pages have traced how his strong idiosyncrasy had degenerated into eccentricity, which threatened to become permanent; future pages will show whether it became so; at present his mind is a commixture of anomalies.

The reader would not have been detained by these remarks, were they not a necessary key to the sequel.

The anomalous character of his second, or acquired, or pseudo nature—or whatever may be the right term to signify the actual working dress in which he acted, spoke and, to a certain extent, thought—struck him for the first time in a positive shape as he walked to Grosvenor Square.

“So I am only just beginning life as an actor and a sympathiser,” thought he; “just beginning. It’s perfectly true; he’s always

right. I begin to understand, or rather I somehow *feel*, that there are hopes, fears, trials, dangers, pleasures, pains, joys and sorrows, not yet experienced, or even realised in my mind. I think there must be such a thing as an immaterial atmosphere. It's very clear that all this did not get into my head through Edgar's words, for he said the same kind of things several times when we were travelling together; nor do I believe that it comes from reflection at all. I seem to inhale a sensation—a sensation of gentle, intermittent ecstasy . . . . He's wrong, though, about Constance; he thinks it because he wishes it. I am sure she has never thought about it."

"Very likely not; but that's no reason *she should* not," said a voice close behind him.

Rupert turned round in an indescribable rage, as might be expected under the circumstances, and encountered the half

kindly, half sarcastic gaze of a man whom he recognised, but could not denominate.

"Take my advice, young fellow," said the stranger, calmly; "and when you think of young ladies, don't do so out loud in the street."

"I don't know you:" growled Rupert, pushing on with long strides.

"There is a certain allegorical personage who is said to be more known than knowing. *I know you!*" observed the obnoxious stranger, sententiously.

Rupert felt strongly tempted to employ his fists in the removal of the obnoxious intruder; but the fear of ridicule, the bugbear of novices, inspired him yet more strongly with the desire of getting out of his way.

The stranger, whom the reader has probably recognised as Sir John Campion, cut off an angle of the crossing and Rupert's



retreat, simultaneously—heading him at the corner of Charles Street, Grosvenor Square.

“You don’t know me, I daresay,” said the imperturbable Sir John, looking carelessly back over his shoulder. “You never saw me, I daresay. . . . You haven’t the least notion who I am. . . . I don’t know that I ever saw *you* before.”

“Then why do you come bothering me in this way?” said Rupert, confronting him. “I’ll pitch you into the gutter, if you don’t be off.”

“I’m not quite so easily pitched into gutters, youngster, though I daresay your biceps muscle is larger than mine,” answered Sir John, with a look of cool composure that deranged Rupert’s self-esteem unpleasantly. “Don’t lose your temper, and make an ass of yourself,” continued Sir John, with that provoking air of conscious superiority, which for good or for evil, but more often, alas! for the latter, exercises

such a tremendous influence over ardent, aspiring inexperience.

Rupert, however, had too much moral and intellectual power, and too rooted a disregard for abstract public opinion, to be thus kept off his balance more than a minute or two ; his very failings helped to prevent it. Sir John watched him with an expression of unconcerned curiosity till that period had nearly expired, and then said, in a more serious tone—

“ The fact is this : I know your brother, and recognised you by your likeness to him. Well, you’re the making of a fine fellow. . . . Now, mind one thing ; you’re now just beginning life ; you have not lived at all yet. Now, don’t make a stumble at the outset, as many a fellow does—as I did. . . . I daresay you won’t believe a word I say ; and if I hadn’t a real respect and regard for your brother, I’d see you d—d before I’d take the trouble of giving it you.”

By accident or design he had this time hit the right nail on the head: Rupert became perfectly tractable at this allusion to his brother. Sir John saw that he had gained his ear, and, by reflection, his respect. He looked hard at him for a moment, and added, emphatically, "The long and short of it is this: If you *do* succeed in winning the heart of the young lady, about whom you were thinking aloud just now, all I can say is, that *you are just the most fortunate man of my acquaintance*. Good-bye; we shall meet again soon."

He turned, and walked quickly back to the corner of Mount Street, where a horse and three or four bystanders gave presumptive evidence of "a deal." Rupert remained in a state of dreamy bewilderment.

"How could he be sure who I was, and make out a stray word or two into all that?" thought Rupert, taking especial care this

time not to let his thoughts stray into the echoing air. "I wonder who he is? . . . By the by, I remember seeing him at Perringston several years ago—of course I do. He's a cousin of theirs. Well, it's a quaint manner of addressing a man in the street. . . . But I rather like the originality of the thing. . . . But it was downright bewildering to hear him wind up with the very same words that Edgar used half an hour ago. . . . It's all visionary: things never fit in so: I should think I had seen pretty well that they don't. Here I am at the door; I don't think I *can* go in. I can't stand Mrs. Grahame. . . ."

"'Il n'y avait pas moyen de rester amoureux d'une femme encadrée de la sorte:' Is that what you mean?" suggested his ubiquitous companion, trotting up on the horse that he was trying, and pulling in for an instant.

"Go in—and don't be a fool," he added,

by way of corollary, putting his horse into a canter.

Rupert followed the first part of his advice, with some misgivings touching the second. An inconsistent being is man. A minute ago, Rupert's single objection to "go in and not be a fool," was the concomitant society of Mrs. Grahame; yet it did not appear that his embarrassment subsided, when he entered the drawing-room and found Constance alone. Perhaps the tenter-hooks of uncertainty were more disagreeable than Mrs. Grahame's actual presence would have been.

Constance was alone! It is all very well to say, that he had been alone with her scores of times before—that they had been brought up together like a brother and sister—that neither had shown any indications of any other feeling—and that therefore the visit, minus the possible presence of Mrs. Grahame, was the simplest thing

imaginable. All this is very plausible, but two counteracting facts remain in the clear background: Since they had last been alone together, both had grown up; and since they had last met, her name had been suggestively coupled with his own. I take these four propositions to be truths: 1. A young lady whom you have known well in her childhood, reminds you far more forcibly of her present state than one whose womanhood is, as it were, a matter of course. 2. If your meeting is a dual one, you will perceive the above fact more distinctly by reason of there being no diverting influences. 3. If contingencies wear an interconnubial aspect, your vision will be still further cleared and your pulses quickened. 4. If this interconnubial idea gets into your head through some one else's tongue, the above-named symptoms will be much stronger than if it entered through your own heart.

Constance was alone—alone at the farthest end of the third room, which the butler, who had known him from his childhood, left him to cross by himself. In spite of the reassuring influence which Constance had the faculty of putting forth to an extraordinary degree, for her age, Rupert felt even less self-composed than when standing by the piano a week before; and, as then, would infallibly have substituted what he did not mean for what he did mean, had not the excessive beauty of Constance attracted his artist-eye, and riveted his attention ere he had time to do so.

There was something for an artist-eye to look at—something for an artist-mind to contemplate—something for an artist-soul to feel: there was something which gently restored to Rupert his self-possession—something which put him at peace with himself and his neighbours.

“You are reading Greek, I see,” he said,

as his eye caught sight of a volume of Plato.

"Yes, with considerable difficulty:" she replied. "I took a great fancy to know something of the language, because I had an idea that it was more full of beauty than any other; so I began, as well as I could, between two and three years — some time ago: but it's very up-hill work without assistance — and I have had none except from the new curate, who only came a month before we left Moorfield."

"If I can be of any use to you, command me in any way:" interrupted Rupert, expansively. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be of any assistance."

Whether he was half jealous of the curate, or merely fascinated by her graceful manner of thanking him, is not known; but his expansiveness certainly developed equally with the subject, upon which he soon began to talk with enthusiasm, turning over



the leaves of the book, and remarking no less enthusiastically upon her marginal pencil marks.

"Why did no one tell me of this before?" said Rupert at length, with refreshing frankness. "People are greater swine than I took them for. To be sure, I have seen nobody."

"It is far better that people should not talk about it:" answered Constance. "The thing itself is very simple, and what any one might have done; but people ridicule the idea of a young lady caring for such reading."

"Ridicule!" repeated Rupert, with a sudden burst of indignation—the first emotion of practical chivalry that he had ever felt. "Ridicule! From whom? of what? If all the idiots in ——"

He broke off as suddenly as he had begun: the gentle mesmerism of beauty was beginning to tell upon him. Constance continued:

"People think it all right that Lady Jane Grey should have learnt Greek from Roger Ascham ; but if the same people were told that I had read the *Timæus* with the curate, they would call me a blue-stockings ; and very possibly they might go so far as to hint that I was an advocate of the rights of women."

"And suppose you did advocate them," interrupted Rupert ; "there is more to be said ——"

"I am only an inexperienced girl," said Constance ; "but I am sure of one thing : rights of women and rights of men are essentially connected, and cannot be separated without injury to both. Everything written or done in that spirit is positively mischievous."

"Yes, done in that spirit," said Rupert ; "but don't you think that there is terrible injustice to women in all classes ?"

"I really am not qualified to enter upon

such a question," answered Constance ;  
"but, as you ask me, I can only say this :  
No doubt there is very great injustice, but  
such as the legislature cannot modify in the  
slightest degree: the whole question is one  
of individual feeling. They may give wo-  
men votes, make them rant on platforms,  
put them into parliament, or do any other  
act of insanity in that line—it is diffi-  
cult to affix a limit to the possibilities  
of another century; but, by doing so, they  
will only increase tenfold the evils of the  
present state of things, and make women  
excessively ridiculous and excessively re-  
pulsive."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Rupert;  
"I only suggested it to make you talk  
about it—you talk so well. Now do go a  
little farther; I like so very much to hear  
you talk about it. I do, indeed," he added,  
with a simple frankness that had an origi-  
nal charm of its own.

"What am I to say?" answered Constance. "As I said before, I am only an inexperienced girl of eighteen; and my only knowledge is, to feel well assured that I know a little less than nothing . . . The way — the only way, in which women can be of national service is by the general tone of feeling which they may, as it were, inspire into others. They do this now, to a very limited degree: to do what they *might* do, they must themselves be very different from what they are at this time."

"And men, too, must be different," said Rupert, "very different. How can any impression be durable on such a set of inconstant ——"

"It is earlier in life that the root of all subsequent good impressions must strike:" interrupted Constance, who was desirous of closing the subject. "A generation educates, not itself, but the next; and women have the . . . I had rather not say any

more about it: I shall fancy myself a Bloomer."

"No one could fancy it; nothing could be more unlike it," said Rupert, energetically.

"But we have digressed from a much more agreeable and more hopeful subject," said Constance, taking advantage of the first available pause. "We were talking of Greek, and I feel so strongly on the subject, that when I find some one who sympathises with my excessive veneration for the language, I am in danger of becoming tiresome; but in truth, I owe very much to Greek — little as I know of it —"

"So do I," interrupted Rupert, his countenance lighting up with a sudden look of expectancy: "I wonder whether it's in the same way . . . To you?"

"To me," replied Constance, "it seemed like a foreshadowed commentary on Revelation. I saw the unmistakable tendency of

the highest wisdom and genius towards Christianity; and in the manner in which Plato gropes his way to it, through fable and speculation—approaching so very near, but not quite reaching it, yet still pointing steadily in the same direction, I saw evidences which, perhaps, would be no evidences at all to many other people, but were wonderfully convincing to me—”

“ St. Augustine, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Justin Martyr, and many more of the early Christians, will bear you out in that:” interrupted Rupert.

“ Perhaps my mind is strangely constituted,” continued Constance; “ for that evidence was more convincing to it than any—except the internal evidence of one’s own heart in those very rare moments when one experiences suffering and *accepts* it. Various causes combined to give a sceptical turn to my mind. As a child I was very much misunderstood and thrown

back upon myself: a few kind, encouraging words from dear Edgar roused me out of that state three years ago. Very soon after that time, I began to learn Greek; but the unmerited sufferings which soon after came upon him, the most saint-like being I had seen, or ever shall see, threw me back nearly to where I was before — I took it wrongly, in fact. Apparent injustice seemed to me, looking only on the surface of things, to be evidence against the existence of a beneficent overruling Providence; I thought I had discovered a new objection, little knowing, in my ignorance, that it was nearly the oldest, most flippant, and shallowest of all. I struggled, however, against myself, by fits and starts; but, I declare, it was not till I was able to read Plato (with considerable difficulty, of course) that I began to see plainly how wisdom and genius lead to faith — folly and presumption, however learned, to the reverse."

Rupert, who for the last three or four minutes had been walking up and down the room, in quick, short turns, here stopped suddenly, and exclaimed :

“ You have described my own case almost without a variation: nearly the same causes produced the same result upon me as upon you, and the same evidence affected me just as it affected you. The only difference is, that I was later in receiving the impression than you were; in fact, I did not receive it fully till last year, when I was freed from the technicalities of study, and, while travelling, used to let my mind roam at its leisure over the materials I had stuffed into it. But Plato’s writings made precisely the same impression on me that they did on you — that of a foreshadowed commentary on Revelation: it made me think further, too, and search my own heart for its own internal evidence . . . But I cannot get over my astonishment at



your originality in resolving to learn Greek of your own accord, and, still more, your persisting in going on with it—because the grammatical difficulties that you have to pass through before you can see your way at all are enough to scare any voluntary learner away from it.”

“I had such a very strong internal conviction of finding something worth working for,” replied Constance, “that my patience was much less burdened than I could have expected; besides which, I was still at the school-room age, and therefore in the habit of grinding over dusty roads to learning. The only difference was, that when Miss Donaldson was with us, the roads were much more dusty, and never led to anything. Besides which, I was dissatisfied with myself, and what I everywhere saw going on around me——”

“At Carlsbad,” parenthesised Rupert.

“I felt dreadfully oppressed,” said Con-

stance, not noticing the parenthesis; "and I really wanted some fresh interest as a kind of safety-valve."

"What they call in Italy a *sfogo*," suggested Rupert.

"Yes," she replied; "and the mass of evil which I saw produced by people who were neither wicked nor stupid, bewildered me.

"*'Mi ritrovai fra una selva oscura  
Che la dritta via era ismarrita.'*"

Only," she added, with a little ringing laugh that melted into the words, "I chose Plato for a guide (that is, as soon as I could spell over his words at all) instead of Virgil. . . . I wish I could have found some parallel that did not involve putting my own unworthy self and doings opposite to the venerated name of Dante."

"I can't think how you did so much, with little or no assistance:" repeated Rupert, in a musing tone.

"When you find out how little I *do* know, you will see how little credit I really deserve," replied Constance.

"I have known people ostentatiously modest of their own merits," observed Rupert, half aloud to himself, as she rose and opened the piano; "but, with the exception of Edgar, she is the only one that I have seen, who is *unostentatiously* so."

Constance roused him from his incipient reverie by reminding him of his last week's promise to sing. He obeyed, saying—

"I have little practice, much less voice, and a great love for music, both on its own account and as one illimitable division of illimitable art. . . . I hope no one has been telling you that I am a singer; they know nothing about it if they have, as you will very soon discover."

The Fates, however, had decreed that the song should for the second time be postponed. Just as he had sat down to the piano, a voice that had been wont of yore

to deliver its oracles from rustling silk, sent forth the following words, which whizzed sharply past an angle of the wall—

“Constance, how could you be such a great fool as to let him in! There was no occasion for it; and you know how rude he was the other evening.”

This very startling interruption arose from an error, the discovery of which was equally startling to Mrs. Grahame. Having learned a few minutes before, on her return from a walk in the square, that Rupert was in the drawing-room, and feeling equally disinclined to leave him in peace, or face him, she steered that middle course which Ovid tells us is the safest, but which, in the present case, proved to be quite the reverse. She stood on the landing of the second story, and peeped over the banisters. From this place of ambush she saw the back of a gentleman descending the stairs, and heard the distant sound of the hall door shutting.

Downstairs she went forthwith, and while crossing the outer drawing-room, expressed her emotions in the manner just related.

But when she turned the angle of the wall, and found herself confronting Rupert himself, her confusion afforded an awful example of the weakness incidental to great minds. She could make a cat's-paw of the Griffin, and make Mr. Grahame apologise for suspecting her of having done so; but Rupert she instinctively dreaded—it might be from mere antipathy, such as is felt for earwigs and spiders—but still she dreaded him; and the circumstances under which they now met were manifestly not adapted to assist in reassuring her.

There she stood, just round the corner of the wall, and there stood Rupert before her, at a distance of nine or ten yards; the one bewildered by a sudden and unaccustomed panic, the other held in suspense by the attraction of opposite passions.

Fifteen or twenty seconds, more or less, they stood thus ; even Constance's tact not being available for such a serio-comic crisis as that. At last the ridiculous carried the day against treasured animosities, and Rupert fairly burst out laughing.

It is a notable fact, that people who have an unconscious faculty of producing humorous scenes out of their own personalities, are, for the most part, apt to be deficient in that of being amused by the same.

Mrs. Grahame, for instance, saw no fun either in her peripatetic scoldings at Moorfield and Carlsbad, her curious bill of costs in the railway carriage, or her rejection of Spuckers's sympathy in the matter of "her ladyship's asking of them ;" but least of all did she appreciate the humour of her present position, which she refused to recognise, and was unable to reject. In sooth, she had only one half of Falstaff's quality ;

she certainly was the cause of wit, or at least of amusement, in others, but she was as certainly not witty herself; her mind was only constructed to understand the primary meanings of circumstances.

In every sense, it may be said that she saw no fun in the matter; for it neither amused her, nor gratified her private feelings of animosity. Whatever her aims and projects were at that time, open rudeness to Rupert was not one of them; nevertheless, either from nervousness or anger, or, perhaps, from faith in the Hahnemannian principle, "*Similia similibus curantur*," she followed up her transmural address by the following:—

"Hum! how do you do? I thought you were gone long ago."

The above salutation being an embarrassing one to answer, with due regard to friendship and relevancy, there resulted from it no particular answer—which lasted

during a space of several seconds, when Mrs. Grahame, mustering up all the tact that she had learnt at the cost of many pin-scars, looked up with a start of surprise, and said—

“Oh, it’s you, Rupert? I’m so glad to see you. . . . I didn’t look up, and I thought it was a nephew of mine who is gone back to Cambridge this morning.”

As cricketers say, “it was well tried at;” and there is no saying how successful it might have been, but for one trifling irregularity, viz. that the start preceded the looking up by about an eighth of a second. At any rate, it served the present purposes of both. It removed the reproach of rudeness from Mrs. Grahame, at the cost of a cheque on her conscience; and it enabled Rupert to part from her in amity, with the prospect of unlimited tête-à-têtes with his fair cousin.



## CHAPTER VIII.

RUPERT went home, according to his appointment. Soon afterwards, Lord Elfin-tower returned from Lincoln's Inn, and Mrs. Grahame sat down to work a banner skreen for a fancy bazaar, in aid of the funds of the Society for Christianising the Papists. It is confidently supposed that the reflections of these three persons ran as given below.

*Lord Elfintower.* "Self! If I could only know that Protæan thing, I should be half way towards mastering some of the large portion of it which mocks my will; and in mastering so much of it, cease to place such abject dependence on external things that are beyond my control."

*Rupert.* "Is this love — this strange attraction of my thoughts towards that drawing-room? I think not. Love is attracted . . . . I cannot say how — but not so — not intellectually, as I am sure this is . . . I am sure this is . . . I am sure this is."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Thank goodness he's gone! I don't know why — but he makes me feel uncomfortable. I . . . . I . . . . I . . . . Good God! I hope she won't take a fancy to . . . . I never should be able to . . . . No, no — no, no — no, no — there's no fear of that — none at all . . . . none at all . . . . (gloomily) it's very little use, though, saying or doing anything anyway, she's so different from Edith — I can't manage her at all. She never gets into a pet, like Edith . . . . she's always so respectful and so yielding in everything which concerns her own convenience only — as if I wanted *that*, when one can't move her an inch."

Lord Elfintower returned to his own house in Arlington Street, mounted on that uncomfortable seat called the horns of a dilemma. It was now half-past two o'clock, and at three he was to be with Lady Ravensdale; but how to get there quietly was a difficulty whose solution, like an evening shadow, receded as he tried to approach it. He had two engagements on hand; first to meet Rupert, according to the promise made before receiving Lady Ravensdale's note; secondly, to call on Lady Ravensdale, according to the promise which that note had so inevitably extracted. The problem was, to perform this second promise without either informing Rupert of it or deceiving him.

"What *am* I to do?" thought he, as he entered the house. "I can't see my way out of it . . . if we were like other brothers, it would be easy enough; but we are on such terms that I can't put him

off without giving a true reason for it . . . If truth lives at the bottom of a well, consistency lives below the bottom. Here am I — a self-elected mentor, prosing away at him all these years, and telling him all sorts of things that he would probably have found out much better for himself, if I had let him alone; here am I miserably hesitating because (it's no use blinking the fact)—because I'm afraid to face him — afraid that he should know where I am going. I shrink from explaining it, or naming the subject, or hearing it named, or hearing her name mentioned at all. Would to God I had not inherited this peerage which forces me to London!"

Rupert was at luncheon, and on good terms with the world, himself included. The occasion was unprecedentedly propitious for slurring over the problem. Lord Elfintower came into the room suddenly, and said :

"Oh, I forgot (at least, I didn't know of it in time — I was so hurried this morning) but the fact is, I must be off directly, for I . . . . I must go and call upon Lady . . . . upon Edith. It will look so strange if I don't, for we *must* meet; and, in fact, she —"

"Wrote to ask you," said Rupert, in a prompting tone of voice. "Well, you know best."

Thoroughly dissenting from this opinion, Lord Elfintower left the house and walked slowly towards that of Lord Ravensdale.

It boots not to enter into his feelings, as he crossed that threshold: his past life is the best and shortest guide to them. I might write page upon page, filled with the records of genuine thoughts and emotions — page upon page of a story reproduced in the memoirs of unnumbered precedents; but the reader knows something of them already, either personally or by

record, in a stronger or a milder form ; and time is short, and Mudie's list long.

Edith was sitting at a writing-table directing some cards of invitation. She was dressed in white muslin, girdled with blue ribbon. Her hair fell in waving streaks of gold over her shoulder. Her cheek flushed faintly as Lord Elfintower entered the room, and instantly relapsed into the unsteady paleness of self-restraint.

She rose from her seat slowly, and rather by a positive effort of will, than by the co-instantaneous action of ordinary volition and the mechanism of the limbs. Lord Elfintower felt as if the beating of his heart must be heard by the servant who announced him.

"It's very kind of you to come:" said Edith, looking up, furtively, as he was turning to sit down.

Her voice was not steady, but under command. Lord Elfintower remained silent.

He could just command himself. Edith clutched a piece of embroidery that lay near, and, running the needle over it at random, said :

“ Yes, it is very kind . . . . Such a visit is far more distressing to you than it would be to any one else, even under the same circumstances — if, indeed, there *is* any parallel to them ; for I can scarcely believe that, even in this age of lies, there is another instance of such base deception, such black ingratitude, as that which has made me supplicate you to come and witness my bitter expiation. I had strong reasons for making the request which you have complied with so generously. I wished to get over this terrible meeting without the presence of strangers. We *must* meet some time or other, more particularly now that you are forced to London by duty — a thing which, I remember but too remorsefully, you never neglect. We *must* have

met, and I never should have had the courage to go through it under the eye of any living creature . . . . But there is one more thing I wished to do. Out of the dreadful load of regret and remorse which crushes me, there is one burden, one only, in my power to throw off. To do that, has been the solitary hope of my solitary heart these two years . . . . two years and four months . . . . I wished to ask your forgiveness. I am not going to attempt any palliation — I feel too deeply humbled, wretched, and remorseful for that. Had I been at all worthy of you, the subtle influence which turned me (to this hour I know not how) would have been powerless. Had I possessed the strength and genius of Constance, I should have . . . . I have nothing to hope — and I deserve that it should be so. This ring, and your merited abhorrence, equally forbid it. I will not ask you to extenuate ; it is better that you



should not — better that you should despise me, as I deserve . . . . Unworthy, self-condemned, I only ask you to forgive me. I ask you to tell me so . . . . I do not ask you to prolong this first and terrible visit . . . . Come again, if . . . . And we *must* meet — we cannot help meeting. After we have met a few times, I shall be able to accept the fate I brought upon myself with outward calmness. I only ask you one thing. Before you go, tell me that you forgive me . . . or, at least, don't say that you will not."

She rose abruptly and walked towards the door of an inner room, holding out her hand as she paused for an instant by Lord Elfintower. He took her hand, hesitated an instant, then pressed it nervously to his lips, and left the house.

"And Rupert tells me I know best!" thought he, as he walked rapidly in the opposite direction to that of his own house.

“ Know best! — of what ? I know less and less about myself, the one solitary subject on which I thought I *did* know something—less and less how to guide myself—less and less how to endure: my powers of endurance have been overtaxed — strained. And yet, after all, what have I done to-day that I could have done differently? Refused to go? Such a step would have been cruel and unmanly, after her note of this morning; and the awkwardness of meeting her, after such a note and such a refusal, would have led to all sorts of complications. I suppose I ought not to have taken — have kissed her hand, when she held it to me. I ought to have spoken, instead of sitting there choked by the beating of my heart. I ought to have shown dignity, and told her that I had come there in consequence of her request — that I hoped she was happy, and that we should meet as friends. I ought to have said,

when she asked me to forgive her, that I had nothing to forgive, or that I had long since done so, or that I was not the person to ask. I ought to feel, as they say, too much pride to have trembled in every nerve when my lips touched her hand. I cannot do, or say, or feel these things. I have no pride in the matter. I feel (God forgive me!) for Lord Ravensdale that which I struggle and pray against; but I never can forget what she once was to me. All the deception in the world cannot efface the only impression left on my heart. She has blighted my life — but she is a woman, and she was once my betrothed bride. I can endure and, please God, resist; but I can do no more.”

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE ENTR'ACTE.

SIX hours after the last scene detailed in the last chapter, Lady Ravensdale is at the Opera, where a goodly assemblage of people are sitting in their boxes, or elsewhere, talking, spying, envying, despising, sorrowing, rejoicing, boring, enjoying, loving, hating, laughing, crying, striving, contriving, pushing, wishing, hoping, foreboding, fearing, suspecting; meanwhile the fallen curtain flaps heavily in the draught, and the contrabassi stand up alone, inanimate sentries of the deserted orchestra.

In Lady Ravensdale's box may be seen; at this moment, almost every young man;

now in the house, who, in virtue of position, fashion or notoriety, has, or imagines he has, an entrée there. On the same tier and side of the house are Mrs. Grahame, Constance, Lord Sevenoaks, and Sir John Champion. On the opposite side of the house, within point blank range of opera-glass and detraction, are, respectively, the slapping fine woman and the Griffin. The former is accompanied by the three distinguished strangers who graced the Tedminster ball three years before ; to wit, the "caterpillar," the hero of the bouquet, and the hero-worshipper of the same. With the Griffin are Count Schönbeck and one or two more men who have no connection with anything recorded in this book.

In the stalls are Lord Elfintower and Rupert. Mr. Grahame is walking about the house in search of a kindred spirit who will talk to him about something that he understands.

The Griffin, being fundamentally a good-natured woman, and having long since resigned herself to the philosophical conclusion that, had the cases been reversed, she would have served Mrs. Grahame as Mrs. Grahame served her, satisfied any little unconscious feelings of resentment that might be still clinging to the outskirts of her memory with the cosmopolitan word *bourgeoise*.

Not so the slapping fine woman, though she herself had served divers people exactly as Mrs. Grahame had served her, and had, in fact, been limited in that respect only by the limitations in her executive power. Not so the slapping fine woman.

True it was, as has been shown, that as the Griffin was to Mrs. Grahame, so was the slapping fine woman to the same, and things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another (*vide* Euclid). Still, by some strange obliquity of vision, the slapping fine woman would not view the matter

as the Griffin did, but pertinaciously ignored her own extreme willingness to tread exactly in Mrs. Grahame's steps, and snubbed sundry inoffensive women by way of a *sfogo*.

But the most curious feature in the case is, that her resentment was comparatively mild towards Mrs. Grahame, the aggriever; stronger, yet a good deal subdued, towards Edith; strongest and unchecked towards Constance (who had nothing at all to do with it)—if you please, I had rather not say why. Somehow or other, a young lady is generically the most popular target for the censoriousness of the great unemployed among her own sex, and the ribaldry of the other. If the tone of her mind exceeds a certain standard fixed by the tacit suffrage of her contemporaries, she must expect that the extra inch will be denied of her, and as much again subtracted; but if to the impertinence of

having grown too much, she add the hypocrisy (what else should it be?) of diffidence, then may she expect for her real self no recognition at all, and very likely no notice at all—certainly very little, unless some loud-tongued friend enforce it by much trumpeting.

In the slapping fine woman's box a conversation, of which the following is a fragment, was going on—she examining the while, with minute carelessness, through her opera-glass, the respective boxes of Lady Ravensdale and Mrs. Grahame.

*Slapping Fine Woman.* "Who is that in Mrs. Grahame's box, half hidden by the curtain?"

*The Caterpillar* (carefully making himself appear to be only half attending to her). "Ha! Wa—a—a—a! Ya—a—as, no; I've met him about somewhere."

*Hero of the Bouquet.* "Wa—a—a—a!"

*His Hero-worshipper.* "Wa—a—a—a!"



*Caterpillar.* "Do you see much of her now?"

*S. F. Woman* (tossing her head and elevating her nose). "No, indeed—since her daughter (correcting herself) I never knew much about her—I always thought her very vulgar."

*The Caterpillar.* "I knew her a little three years ago; but when the handsome one married, I didn't care to keep it up."

*S. F. Woman* (smiling a sharp smile). "I suppose you kept up your acquaintance with Lady Ravensdale?"

*The Caterpillar.* "It's very hot; shall I open the door? Ha! Wa—a! ya—as. I went to a ball of hers the other day."

*S. F. Woman* (tossing up her nose). "Of course; dancing men can easily get in among the crowd."

*The Caterpillar.* "Ya—as! I don't dance much; it's too crowded, though the

rooms are large. I only lounge in for a bit."

*S. F. Woman.* "I wonder you don't lounge into her box now; all the fashionable men are there!" (*Exit the Caterpillar in search of an ice.*)

*S. F. Woman.* "They say her husband neglects her beyond anything—serves her right for behaving so." Here the hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper exchanged grins, in reference to the fact that the abuser and the abused were, as regarded the subject of abuse, "very much alike—specially Pompey;" the slapping fine woman having herself done precisely the same as Edith; the only difference being that the slapping fine woman had done so without external influence, and for a much smaller prize.

"Serves her right for behaving so," repeated the slapping fine woman, in a voice that trembled with some kind of emotion—

perhaps it was pity; "serves her well right. It's nonsense to say her mother had anything to do with it: I know my own sex better."

This powerful argument was conclusive: the hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper transferred their grins to the opposite box, and sat with their hands impocketed, heavily listening. The slapping fine woman continued thus:

"And I am sure she consoles herself for her husband's neglect . . . Look at all those men there . . . And as to the one she threw over—I'm *so* glad he has inherited an Earldom—I *hope* she's satisfied with herself now . . . There, now, just look there; there he is in the stalls—I know it is, for he was pointed out to me at the Tedminster ball; but how altered he is . . . And look at her now: she hasn't taken her eyes off him these ten minutes, nor he off her. It's very odd to me if something ——"

She paused; her heart was too full for utterance. Presently she turned her opera-glass to Mrs. Grahame's box, and said:

"Ha! ha! ha! Lady Ravensdale hasn't got all those men to herself though: her sister has hooked one of them — look how triumphant she looks about it . . . *She* affects to look classical — ha! ha! ha! She's by way of reading, too, they say — and her mother tells people that she's so diffident, and doesn't pretend to know anything. I daresay she does take that line — it's a way of fishing for a compliment; but she may fish long enough before she'll have the chance of doing like her sister: men don't like that sort of humbug. Hoogh, hoogh, hoogh!"

While the slapping fine woman was thus indulging the worst feelings of her nature, in the satisfied conviction that she fulfilled her own duties much better than the average of slapping fine women,

Lord Elfintower was, as she had said, intently watching a box on the opposite side of the house: but it was *not* Lady Ravensdale's — it was Mrs. Grahame's. Lady Ravensdale was also intently watching some one in his direction: but it was *not* him — it was a lady in a box on the pit tier.

"I suppose I must go to Mrs. Grahame's box:" thought Lord Elfintower, a cold shiver passing through him simultaneously with the idea.

Rupert was already there — a fact to be gathered from the expression of Mrs. Grahame's countenance, for the possession of which various conflicting feelings contended. Lord Elfintower walked slowly out of the stalls, thinking over all that he had thought, said, done and heard since breakfast, and marvelling at his brother's monomaniacal obtuseness in telling him that he knew best.

"I wish I *did* know best," thought he, proceeding very slowly on his way to Mrs. Grahame's box: "I wish I could be truly said even to know what is worst—to know at all what I am doing. I wish I knew what *not* to do . . . If the confidence we place in the judgment of physicians is as misplaced as Rupert's is in mine. . . . Well, unless people comprehend and repent the evil they have done, they repeat their faults, no matter how much they may have suffered for them. Mrs. Grahame will repeat the game she played three years ago; and I, who am told I know best—I dragged him into it: but for me he would never have gone near them . . . Mrs. Grahame has put her thumb upon Sevenoaks. I wonder whether she knows that I ——"

By this time he had arrived within three or four paces of the box, from the door of which issued Sir John Campion, who stopped and said:

"I haven't seen you this week; I've got an amusing story to tell you of what happened to me this morning — a story that's as good as a farce — if you'll walk along here a bit, before you go in. By the by, if you look just opposite when you go in, you'll see the *grosse blonde* of the Tedminster ball. Don't you remember blowing me up for quoting Béranger about her, when we were wondering who she was, as we drove to Ernsford Court at sunrise? Well, there she is — and the fellow who made a blackguard scene with a bouquet, and the two other cads that were with him — there they are, all jolly together, except the chubby little girl — I wonder what's become of her? Come and dine with me to-morrow."

Lord Elfintower went into Mrs. Grahame's box, Sir John into another, and this narrative into Lady Ravensdale's.

Edith was still watching the box on the

pit tier, which the slapping fine woman had construed to signify Lord Elfintower's stall. She was still watching it intently; the slapping fine woman was still laughing fatly; the hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper were still sitting with hands impocketed, listening heavily. Edith sat in her box, the object of as much homage as fascination, great, yet within the bounds of average appreciativeness, can ensure for a woman so placed as to attract it. Among the hundreds then assembled within the walls of the theatre, nearly every man, on whose attentions either fashion or position had set either a real or conventional value, was paying her homage—they were wasting time and a considerable aggregate amount of agreeability. Edith heard them not; her eyes were fixed upon the box in the pit tier—and the good and the evil spirits warred fiercely for the mastery of her. In that box she recognised the face seen once before—in Bond street on



her marriage morning: within a few boxes of her own was Lord Elfintower—the shadow of his former self . . . . Where was her husband?

## CHAPTER X.

DAYS passed by, but neither of the two visits, made respectively by the brothers, had altered the current of their lives, or the lives of those whom they had visited: so sinks by completion the importance of important interviews.

Lord Elfintower got over his interview with Edith as he had got over his last interview with her at Carlsbad—by a strong exercise of will: how far he had got over it internally—how far anyone does so, we have no means here below of measuring; but he did externally, and met her by not unfrequently going into society.

Edith looked, spoke, and acted not other-

wise than before the interview, and received her accustomed homage not otherwise than she had done before her long, abstracted gaze at the box on the pit tier. Rupert called on the Grahames two days after his first and notable morning visit; he called twice again within the same interval of time, and during the period contained within those three visits, he met Constance at two balls, a concert and a dinner-party: but whenever he called, Mrs. Grahame sat in the room, working at her banner screen, and taking up two-thirds of the conversation: at each ball she routed him and Constance out of a boudoir or a tented balcony, to take away the latter at an unusually early hour: at the concert she chose the seats that were most impenetrable, by reason of toe, petticoat and civility: at the dinner-party they sat down to dinner so late, and the post-prandial sitting was so long, that, coming late, and not being next

to Constance during the dinner proper, he never spoke to her at all.

The following Monday was the first day of the Ascot week ; and Mrs. Grahame, being convinced that it was the duty of a good wife to facilitate her husband's legitimate amusements, set off with a cheerful countenance to pass the week at a house in the neighbourhood, to which she had ingeniously contrived to be invited for the week. There being a vacant seat in her carriage, Lord Sevenoaks, who was invited to the same house, went with them. Sir John Campion went to some other house in the neighbourhood.

Lord Ravensdale is supposed to have gone off in a barouche and four, with a hamper, and three men smoking cigars a foot long — at least four men in blue veils drove off from his door, or thereabouts, on that morning ; but they having all one face among them, and that in common with the

occupants of several other barouches and four, the fact cannot be stated positively.

Edith remained in London, and sat for her picture to an Italian painter, who had just come over, and been much recommended to her by the Griffin.

Lord Elfintower passed the week at Ernsford Court: Rupert did the same.

So passed the fortnight that followed the two important interviews.

## CHAPTER XI.

ABOUT the middle of June, or thereabouts, the brothers returned to London. Their stay at Ernsford Court had not been beneficial to either. Lord Elfintower was oppressed by an unwonted feeling of gloom, and Rupert's mind had fallen out of tune, as it had been before his long visit to Constance.

I know not whether it be, that important events in the life of the affections leave a permanent local impression, perceivable by some unknown sense which cannot be transferred to another place or person ; but positively true is the fact, that the bodily presence of the person loved recalls past memories less powerfully than the scenes

that localise them. The meeting in London was a wrench to Lord Elfintower's heart, but the solitary hours in the old gallery at Ernsford Court were as melting ice dropping upon it slowly.

I know not whether it be, that counter-acting influences lie dormant in effect till their action is over; but positive is the fact, that a cold response to a yearning heart looks coldest in the mirror of retrospection. The fruitless visits, the disappointment at the dinner-party, the avoidance at the concert, and the half-concealed slights at the two balls, were seeds of internal discord sown in Rupert's mind; they germinated in the solitude of Ernsford Court.

They arrived in London about four o'clock. Soon after five, Lord Elfintower looked up from a writing-table at his brother who was fixing a spur into its box, and said:

"What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"I have no very definite plan, or, rather, only part of one," answered Rupert.

"And that is?" asked the other in a suggestive tone.

"Why, I suppose," said Rupert, "I ought to call on the Grahames, oughtn't I?"

"That's exactly what I should like to know," replied Lord Elfintower, with a readiness that was almost anticipative—the overflowing readiness of one who had his answer ready, but wished to avoid bringing it out in the form of a question.

"Exactly what *you* should like to know!" interrupted Rupert. "Then who *is* to know?"

"Anyone, everyone," answered his brother, with an air of deep conviction that became almost comic by position; "anyone more than myself. *You* can tell much better than I can; you have no idea how very little I know; you have no idea how little my judgment is worth; *I* had no idea



how little . . . till . . . till I required it most."

Rupert set his foot on the ground with more energy and less care that the completed act of imboxing a spur warranted: the consequence was a long spur-mark on the polished surface of the other boot.

"It was not judgment at all that you required in the matter—I know what you are thinking of—it's not judgment, it's not judgment," he said, in a growling monotone; "it's something else—it's a different nature that's required, to relieve you from the most complicated state of unmerited suffering that ——"

"I don't believe in the existence of unmerited suffering," said Lord Elfintower.

"Well, well, I'm not speaking theologically ——"

"Nor I necessarily so."

"Well, I don't care; I'm speaking comparatively; one can only speak of a man

comparatively with other living men, not with theoretical ones."

Just then a note was brought in; it was from Edith, to the effect that she hoped they would go to her concert that evening, if they returned in time for it. Lord Elfin-tower turned deadly pale as he touched the note — paler than when he had met her unexpectedly at Mrs. Grahame's. Rupert was silent for some minutes, and tears came into his eyes — a strange spectacle, considering his general appearance and bearing.

"I believe that the world is given over to moral anarchy, and the chain of events woven by evil spirits," said he, in a low, nervous voice, as he left the room.

I know not whether it be, that morbid resentment gives to the mind the sort of sullen contentedness which a blister gives to the body; but positive is the fact, that when one's offer of peace for a real or imaginary injury or affront is or appears to be

rejected, the worst part of one's nature feels comforted, the better part interprets that feeling to mean either resignation or philosophy, according to one's theological views, and the spirit of evil bounds away out of one's hearing, roaring lustily his triumph.

*E. g.* Rupert rode direct to Grosvenor Square; the butler said, in an unwilling voice, "*Not at home.*" Constance's horse was at the door; Mr. Grahame and Lord Sevenoaks were riding round the square. Rupert drew a long, free breath, and rode off, with a vague impression that he had done all he could for a contemptible society.

I know not whether it be, that animal spirits, like a river, run wildest when they are let loose to form a fresh channel as they flow; but positive is the fact, that the removal of any restraint, however wholesome and even once welcome, gives to the mind a temporary and false impetus which apes relief.

*E. g.* Rupert had felt unwontedly happy when sitting with Constance a fortnight before: he felt an exciting sense of exhilaration now, as he put his horse into a canter on the other side of Grosvenor Gate.

His horse was fresh after a week's rest, and began to pull rather hard when he got into Rotten Row. Rupert's spirits rose like the gas from a soda-water bottle whose cork has just flown high into the air; he sat back, and let his horse go at three parts speed to the end and back, and back again, pulling up to a walk by the gates at the end. By the time he pulled up, his horse, being in no condition to speak of, was in a lather and pretty well pumped; Rupert's exhilaration, too, diminished with the pace; they turned from the railings very soberly.

By this time it was half-past six o'clock; the sun was behind the distant trees, and a fresh westerly breeze had sprung up, after a day of intense heat. Rupert turned up

by Kensington Gardens — the reins on his horse's neck, and his sensations lost in vacuity — in the space which, unknown to himself, had held the image of Constance Grahame.

Within a few yards of the gate he pulled up, facing the gardens, to meet the cool breeze and, as it were, listen for a stray whisper of some positive inclination amid the horrid stillness of becalmed feeling. A strange, cold-throbbing, half-physical sensation of loneliness came over him, then an indefinite longing, then a vague impression of objectless and unhopeful pursuit, then a mixed passion of self-disallowed heart-yearning, morbid resentment, and self-reproach disguised as self-congratulation ; in truth, his mind was at sea, without rudder or compass. A strong faculty, inborn but long dormant, had been awakened, partially developed, and checked ; but a plant that has once taken root must either wither or

expand in some direction or other; and Rupert's was too high a type of human nature to sink altogether from its aspirations, and wallow with bestial contentedness in grovelling, unsensuous sensualism. Hence his position was, among quasi precedents, unusually trying; for he clung with a sort of chivalrous devotion to the objectless pursuit which only represented the real and disallowed object that inspired him to do so.

From the mental abstraction which had come over him since pulling up by the gardens, he was roused by his horse shying completely across the road, all but slipping up in doing so.

"Well saved," said he; "it's a wonder I was not off—letting the reins out of my hand, and going to sleep in that way . . . I wonder whether he did touch; he was very nearly down, if not quite."

The horse had not actually touched the ground; but in getting off to ascertain

the fact, Rupert discovered the cause of his shying, which proved to be a child's hat and feather that had blown over the fence. Picking up the hat, and looking round for its owner, he saw coming out of the gate a lady so handsome that five minutes afterwards he could neither analyse her beauty nor remember whether the child-owner of the hat and feather belonged to her or no: all he remembered was, that a form of exceeding beauty had passed before him — that he had involuntarily given her the hat — that she had thanked him with a grace equal to her beauty — that she had driven off in a brougham — finally, that her countenance had left upon his mind a feeling of sadness, such as never had form of beauty, animate or inanimate, done before.

He rode slowly back — not thinking, but stagnating on a loosely connected set of unuttered words. His visual memory dwelt

upon the beautiful stranger with less self-reserve than it had been accustomed to do upon Constance.

Constance used to be received by his thoughts with a hush.

As he turned into Rotton Row Sir John Campion cantered up, and said in passing:

"Don't forget that you're to dine with me to-day. I thought I had better remind you, for you seem in no hurry to get home. I don't want to be later than eight, if I can help it, for I'm very hungry I've had nothing to eat since ten o'clock this morning."

"How that man jokes away his life," grumbled Rupert to himself. "He's very amusing, certainly. . . . He has too much intellect for the sort of life he leads . . . Curious that a man who has so much ability, and who is not altogether deficient in moral consciousness, should be as happy as the day is long, leading such a life. Society is hopelessly rotten."



"I wish I were that boy," thought Sir John Campion. "What a blessed thing to be beginning life with such chances—such immense chances of happiness, if he only has the sense to know what happiness really means, and not throw away the substance for the shadow. What would I not give to change places with him! . . . I daresay he thinks I am a very jolly fellow—happier than anyone . . . If he could only know 'the secrets of my prison-house'—only see into my heart, at odd moments that I could point out, he would have some idea of what it is for a man who *has* some brains and some moral consciousness to look at his own wasted life, and feel a hopeless appreciation of and longing for something better. I sometimes think, that the best and only service I could do now would be to exhibit myself at the Egyptian Hall, as a warning to novices beginning life in this big town. I'm afraid

that the seductions of the big town will vitiate the purity of his taste ; . . . true, he has a much better chance than I had ; but then he is beginning life late, which is always a dangerous thing for a man."

Each rode home, satisfied of having understood the other. So do each of us travel along the road of life, more or less satisfied of understanding our neighbours, and more or less misinterpreting them more or less conscientiously.

The dinner was at Greenwich, and the time therefore not more than sufficient for dressing rather quickly and arriving at the Trafalgar at three or four minutes before eight. Sir John had preceded them by about as many minutes. They found him in one of the little balconied rooms that seem to be suspended midway between the smoke-tinged sky and the equally unsubstantial mud beneath.

"I have asked no one else, except Seven-

oaks," said Sir John. "I fancy you agree with me, that great dinners here are one of the greatest nuisances endured in the name of pleasure; they always appear to me in the shape of a deprecatory offering made to dulness, which I take to be one of the presiding spirits in this enterprising country."

"Like staying at \* \* \*," suggested Lord Sevenoaks, as he entered the room.

"Exactly," answered Sir John. "There's a house of that sort in every county, and two, on an average, in the large ones. Staying at them is the homage that amusement pays to its liege lord, patience. We are a fine sturdy people, and run alone like men; but, as Froissart says, we 'take our pleasures sadly.' . . . I think we had better begin, for it takes nearly an hour to drive back."

"Yes, and I want to be early at Lady Ravensdale's concert," said Lord Sevenoaks.

"I suppose you are all going?"

"I can't go till late; I have a foreign

letter to finish," observed Rupert, from the balcony, apparently addressing his remark to the bare-legged boys in the mud, rather than to his three companions within the open window.

It was lucky that they had only one hour devotable to the science of gastrology, for it required all Sir John Campion's tact and conversational power to hold the team together and make them pull at the subject he started.

Rupert, being fundamentally well bred, would not be advisedly rude to a guest of his own or of anyone else, but within three, hours of seeing Lord Sevenoaks riding round Grosvenor Square while "not at home" was said to himself, and Constance's horse was at the door, it was not likely that they would be eligible neighbours at a Greenwich dinner, more especially when it is taken into consideration that the symptoms indicated in Grosvenor Square bore so

remarkable a resemblance to a certain line of policy followed out at Carlsbad, that Spuckers was heard to say as she looked out of the window: "Lor, to be sure, now! if she ain't at her old tricks again!"

Lord Sevenoaks, being much preoccupied with parliamentary and county subjects that interested him excessively, was scarcely, or not at all, aware of any uneasiness in Rupert's manner.

Lord Elfintower exerted himself with success; but he was in irrepressibly low spirits, and the visible exertion diminished the effectiveness of the success. Sir John Campion, not having the key to Rupert's manner, attributed it to one of the unimportant crosses probable by analogy; and dismissed it from his mind with an internal laugh, thinking:

"I shouldn't wonder if I hit the right nail on the head by accident the other day, when I chaffed him in the street and, at

the same time, gave him such good advice. . . . I wonder why I did it! . . . It's very odd, but I can't help feeling a sort of veneration for his brother, which makes me take an interest in this clever, interesting and disagreeable young cub. . . . I suppose he has been making love to Miss Grahame, and that uncommonly repulsive mother of hers stuck up her bristles at him, because she would prefer something grander. She's wrong — that's all I can tell her. She's very sharp, but she doesn't know the world as I do, or she would know what an anomalous thing it is that she feels so secure about — she would know that her daughter is too harmoniously beautiful in person and mind, to meet with that kind of general admiration which results in a large assortment of splendid offers. She's not sufficiently *tranchante* — one or two defects inserted in her whole self, as she is, would bring half London at her feet . . . As it is —

if it were not for her money, she would very likely go on for the next half-dozen years without a single offer, except such as would make her mother's hair stand on end. Mrs. Grahame is so cock-a-hoop at having managed the other so cleverly that she can't see the difference between her two daughters. She has got a "customer" in this one, I think: if she manages her, she ought to be made foreign secretary for life."

This mental soliloquy was concentrated into the space of a few seconds, as they rose to go away.

At the conclusion a shade of sadness came over his countenance: he began an amusing story, and broke off for want of impetus.

"When are you going to make a reputation for yourself in the House?" said he, in an absent manner, to Lord Elfintower.

"Don't be a man who can and won't."

"It's too late in every way," answered

Lord Elfintower. "I can't do it now.  
. . . There are plenty of speakers."

"You may make a reputation for yourself—at least if having every personal qualification will ensure it," said Sir John.

"No," answered Lord Elfintower, with the calm decision of a man who has himself exhausted all pros and cons on the subject. "No — not even if I were able to go through with it. In the House of Lords a man may retain and increase his reputation; but he must make it in the House of Commons."

By the time the brothers arrived in that quarter of London, postally distinguished by the letter W, it was nearly half-past ten o'clock. For the first time since leaving Greenwich Rupert spoke of his own accord.

"I can't go to . . . to the concert yet," said he, shaking himself up from a corner of the brougham. "I must finish a letter — I shall have no time to-morrow;



and — I'll come by-and-by . . . I'll get out here, I think."

"I can't take upon my judgment to advise him otherwise — at least not at present:" said Lord Elfintower half aloud.

Rupert got out at the corner of Doyer Street; his brother went in to Lady Ravensdale's concert.

And what had Constance been doing the while? Had any thoughts corresponding to Rupert's entered openly or disguised into her heart?

The question indicates the fact: the important visit had had a dual attraction: the subsequent disappointments had been dual disappointments. The difference was in the details only — details varying in consequence of causes the results of which may be summed up in these words: She was more developed than Rupert — half-a-dozen years more, if one may hazard a gross measurement of such an unmeasurable thing

as progression. She had found herself alone in very trying positions at a time when Rupert, though four years older, had no experience of any other difficulty than a difficult passage in a Greek play; but it is needless to compare them here, for the reader already knows them apart; and even, *cæteris paribus*, sex alone will make a shift to explain why Constance not only saw into her own heart clearer and sooner than Rupert, but saw also into his.

She saw into her own — an indefinable sense of completeness came over her deliciously. She saw into his — an ineffable sense of joy vibrated through her like an electric current. It is not possible to know when she first did so; such moments are as impossible to date exactly as is the actual moment of falling asleep; but it was so before the morning of the concert.

But she saw farther — and the poison, anxiety, crept slowly in where joy had

vibrated: she foresaw further yet — and the long train of probable evils, to be watched and endured in passive uncertainty of their event, was spread out before her as her woman's heritage.

She had seen Rupert ride up to the door, and had seen him turn from it: she had noted the succession of unpropitious circumstances as they had occurred, and noticed how they seemed to converge at that time and place: she saw and foresaw the full import of that convergence: she saw and foresaw how terribly helpless she was to control its effects.

This was an instalment of her woman's heritage, or, more correctly, that portion of it which does not descend to her by fair inheritance, but out of the hoarded accumulations of wrong which, from passing almost continuously without protest, have become permanent rules of action. Accumulated precedents have so perverted in-

tersexual equity, that truth in this matter has become adulterated, and injustice to woman is, as it were, woven into the delicate threads which twine round and guard woman's distinctive purity. But for this unconscious feeling, Rupert would have put forth the power which nature and society gave him, to do that which nature and society forbade Constance to do: he would have determined to assure himself, whether the feeling which he recognised in himself and doubted in her when he entered Lady Ravensdale's drawing-room, were mutual or not: he would have felt that the doubt gave her a sacred claim upon him which nothing but a disavowal from her own lips could cancel.

As it was, he, with the means of information at hand, accepted the interpretation which entailed a probable wrong. Would he have acted so towards a suspected pick-pocket? It is unnecessary to answer the

question; and yet he honestly had more chivalrous feeling in him than most men.

In this matter Constance is liable to two very frivolous charges. Prudery says: It is unmaidenly to dwell on the contemplation of a love whose reciprocity she has no evidence to suppose. Restrictiveness standing in a groove, says: It is unnatural that a girl of eighteen should bestow her affections on one practically younger than herself: a young girl will always bestow them where she can look up to, &c.

This is not the place to examine these propositions, but to deny their applicability to the case in point; and for this purpose only they are introduced. First, Constance *had* evidence—evidence such as the denser perceptions of men cannot experience: secondly, the same perceptions showed him to her not merely as he was circumstantially, but as he was essentially—so that she did look up to him. How

far he deserved that she should do this, is a question for the sequel to show.

In the meanwhile the prospect is not encouraging. At about half-past eleven o'clock, just as the concert was being wound up with the chorus, "Vadasi via di qua," Rupert arrived, stood in the doorway for a few minutes, turned away while Constance was becrowded within a dozen feet of him, and left the house.

Constance had been watching that door with the furtive, straining, passionate inquietude, so powerful and so powerless, which we men *may* understand through sympathy — it would be well if more of us did — but which the mirror of our own personal experience cannot possibly reflect correctly.

For the last hour and a half, she had watched that door whenever, and as long as, her eyes could wander there without at-

tracting notice—such notice as is neither positively harmful nor clearly definable, but such as a womanly woman avoids.

For the last five minutes she had been aware of his presence, though her eyes were turned away from the door; and then the watching became more furtive, more intense, more poignant, more anxious.

The concert was over. She rose from her seat, and for several minutes unavoidably stood where she rose. And then Lord Sevenoaks, being near, came up and talked to her; and they both stood within twenty feet of the spot where Rupert stood. Could she have repaid courtesy by discourtesy, and turned away from him? And then he offered her his arm, and they walked together towards the doorway where Rupert was. Could she have repaid courtesy by discourtesy, and refused his arm unreasonably? And then she looked furtively through the crowd, and half seeing Rupert, as through

a mist, whilst Lord Sevenoaks bent down to address some ordinary remark to her, blushed tremulously, and dropped her eyes. She raised her eyes as she passed through the doorway: Rupert was gone.

He was not in the doorway, nor in the crowd that circled down the staircase, nor in the crowd that thronged the supper room, nor in the crowd that fluctuated between the cloak room and the hall door. He had left the house while Constance was be-crowded within a few feet of the spot where he had stood: he had turned from the doorway whilst the blush at his own near presence tinged her cheek as she talked to another. He had turned away, accepting unproved conclusions: he had turned away, conscientiously deeming himself justified in doing one of the most unjustifiable acts that the most perverted conscience ever tolerated. I humbly submit, that this is one of the trials which comes to woman



not by fair inheritance, but through perversion of intersexual equity.

\* \* \* \*

The concert had been over nearly half-an-hour : only some dozen people remained, either waiting for their carriages or talking to those who waited. Edith was sitting alone on a sofa in a room within the supper-room. She looked solitary tired, and dejected : her face was averted from the door, her cheeks pale, her eyes fixed vacantly upon the bouquet, which she was slowly pulling to pieces and scattering on the floor. Lord Elfintower passed near where she was — so near that it was scarcely possible for him to leave the house without noticing her. He hesitated for a moment, and went on : Edith rose listlessly from the sofa, and came into the outer room.

“ I can't find Rupert : I suppose he is gone,” said Lord Elfintower, looking round the almost empty room.

"He only stayed a few minutes," answered Edith, in an abstracted, hopeless tone, as she slowly walked to the foot of the staircase. "He never came near me at all . . . All whose opinion I care for despise me; and I have no home duties to turn to — no interest to take me from myself — nothing to look to . . . I am very weary."

She passed on and ascended the stairs, without raising her eyes or saying another word.

There was one person whose eagle eye had seen Rupert in the doorway at the concert that evening, and in seeing him, saw through the whole story: that person was the acute Dowager. Having seen it, she devoted full five minutes to the subject — reasoning with herself as follows:

"There's that vulgar Mrs. Grahame thinking that it's the thing to snub him as a matter of course because he's a younger

son . . . She thinks it's fine to do that — that's the way with most of those rich *parvenus*: they are ten times more worldly than the people who are most abused for being so . . . What an idiot she is! She thinks herself very sharp because she had no conscience in the other match (for which she deserves to do penance in a white sheet — how pretty she would look doing it!) she thinks herself very sharp; but she can't see beyond her own turn-up nose: she thinks to drive everything and everybody before her by sheer weight of purse . . . How brutally stolid she must be not to appreciate the luxury of saying *Yes* to a child's spontaneous choice! . . . I can't help whether it looks like match-making or not: but I'm so fond of that girl — I certainly will speak my mind the first opportunity I have . . . One of them has been sacrificed to my unworthy son; and I feel as if that gave me a sort of responsibility for the other."

## CHAPTER XII.

THE month of June had been counted out, but nothing had occurred to alter or modify the relative positions of Rupert and Constance, as described in the last chapter.

Conscience, like a microscope, will not reflect an object correctly unless the focus be correct: in both cases the fault lies not in the means given, but in the manner of using those means. Rupert rejected frequent opportunities of testing his unproved conclusions; and this line of conduct was justified by his conscience, because those conclusions had never been placed fairly before it.

He called once, at half-past seven o'clock, when they were dressing for dinner; but he

refused all invitations, rode at eight o'clock in the morning, and writhed cheerfully under the poison-garment of a cynicism foreign to his nature.

Constance saw, heard, comprehended, felt — and was powerless, though full of power.

Lord Sevenoaks admired her very much, thought about her a good deal, and felt towards her as warmly as the maximum temperature of his nature would allow: but she strongly put forth that indefinable repelling power which is distinctively a defensive arm of woman and flourishes most in the armoury of beauty: she put it forth as only a clever woman can do — invisibly to all but himself, whom she caused to be aware of the fact conveyed, without feeling the process of conveyance. He hung in puzzled suspense — unwilling to retire, yet mysteriously prevented from advancing. It is needless to add that he was totally ignorant of having Rupert for a rival.

Lord Elfintower met Edith at various houses and elsewhere, several times, and she always looked as she had looked at her own concert — always spoke in the same absent, hopeless tone. Thus events progressed or stood still, while time rolled on till July had reached its second week.

Mrs. Grahame, having fulfilled for that season her festal duties to society, proposed to follow the example of her neighbour, Lady Rossden, and leave town early in the next week for \* \* \* shire. This measure Mr. Grahame considered to be a signal proof of her wit, as in fact it was—more than he imagined. Lord Ravensdale was going to start for Norway about the same time: Edith proposed to stay at Moorfield till the end of August: Sir John Campion was going to remain in town till the end of July, and then pay a series of country visits: Lord Elfintower and Rupert were going to leave town in a few days, and go, first

to Ernsford Court for a week — then to his other property—then back to Ernsford Court. The slapping fine woman and her friends, the caterpillar, the hero of the bouquet and his hero-worshipper went to Baden-Baden.

Two days after Edith's concert the Dowager Lady Ravensdale had left town, on account of the illness of a married daughter in a distant county: therefore, she had not yet carried out her intention of speaking her mind and harassing that of Mrs. Grahame. But delay had no connection with abandonment in the practice of the acute Dowager; and the day after her return, viz. Tuesday in the second week of July, a family coach, broad and deep, with a lozenge on the panels, drove up to No. 100, Grosvenor Square.

The interview passed off in the following manner.

*Scene:* The farther drawing-room. Mrs. Grahame *sola*, working at her banner-screen.

The acute Dowager having entered the room and shaken hands with her in the most repelling manner that could possibly co-exist with good breeding, sits down firmly on an ottoman exactly opposite. Mrs. Grahame becomes small in her own eyes and, would shake in her shoes, were it not that the latter fit so tight as to prevent any oscillation within them. She makes one or two remarks on the heat of the weather, and the coolness of the shrubbery at Moorfield as compared with the ball-room at \* \* \* house two nights before; to which the acute Dowager assents with an air of persistency that indicates mischief to an unquiet conscience. This state of things lasts just two minutes; when the Dowager, who is rather pressed for time, and did not come to be trifled with, plunges *in medias res* suddenly, and the dialogue proceeds as follows :

*Dowager.* "What a fine young man



Lord Elfintower's brother is: I never saw one who promised better in every respect. Why has he suddenly given up going out, as they tell me he has done for the last three weeks?"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I . . . I . . . really don't know."

*Dowager* (fixing her eagle eyes on the two round patches of red which have just appeared on Mrs. Grahame's cheeks). "I beg your pardon?"

*Mrs. Grahame* (feebly). "I . . . I . . . really don't know."

*Dowager.* "Oho!"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I . . . we don't see very much of him . . . he . . . I . . . they . . . we ——"

*Dowager.* "Oh! I beg your pardon. I thought Mr. Grahame had been guardian to him and his brother . . . I *thought* he had been a relation ——"

*Mrs. Grahame* (quickly). "Oh! dear, yes — he is . . . he's nearly related."

*Dowager* (very coldly). "Ah, really! I didn't know *that*—Well, I am always sorry to hear of family quarrels, more particularly between a guardian and his ward . . . the appearance is always so terrible . . . and the world exaggerates and invents . . . It's the most unfortunate *kind* of quarrel that can be . . . It's very lamentable—very."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "O . . . o . . . o . . . oh! Lady Ravensdale . . . you *know* better than that."

*Dowager*. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Grahame. I know nothing whatever about it, except what you have told me of *your own accord*."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "There never was any quarrel at all, or even coolness . . . I can't think who can have put such an idea into your head."

*Dowager*. "Really I don't understand you. I know nothing about it except what you have just told me of *your own accord*."

*Mrs. Grahame* (looking bewildered).  
"But what *can* I have said?"

*Dowager*. "I understood you to say that you saw very little of Mr. Ernford now: and as Mr. Grahame was his guardian, and you say they are *nearly* related, I could only conclude that there was some unfortunate family division. But we have got upon a disagreeable subject . . . It doesn't signify . . . I should not have remarked upon what you told me, were it not that people *will* notice and in fact have *noticed* the thing, and . . . But really, I have no sort of business whatever to enter upon your private affairs."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "It's very kind of you, I'm sure, to tell me — and I hope you'll contradict it — there's not a word of truth, I can assure you — and it's very wicked of people to go about telling such horrid stories of people — and I can't imagine what can have put such things into their

heads — and there's not a shadow of truth in it — and I hope you'll tell everybody so."

*Dowager.* "Of course I shall say so for my daughter-in-law's sake: but no one will believe me, though of course they will not say so before me: they will only say that I have been made to believe what's not the case. I'm very sorry that it should be so — of course it *can't* be pleasant to me: but I think it better to tell you what I know they *will* say — in fact two or three old friends *have* said so, when I told them that I believed there was no quarrel."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "It's very hard that people should be so ill-natured about things that one can't help — I'm sure it's very kind of you to tell me of it . . . I am very much obliged to you."

*Dowager* (aside). "Il n'y a pas de quoi: " (aloud), "yes, it *is* hard: but they will do it."

*Mrs. Grahame.* “. . . And they told you that?”

*Dowager.* “Yes, and hinted more.”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “A . . . a . . . a what?”

*Dowager.* “I shouldn’t like to say. . . . But, you see, the position of a guardian is a delicate one.”

*Mrs. Grahame* (coming over in a prickly heat). “Good heavens! Who can be safe, when such wicked stories are set about? A . . . a . . . a it’s quite horrid!”

*Dowager.* “Well, really, if you look at the matter fairly, you will see that it is not so *very* astonishing, or such a great proof of the world’s ill-nature. Strangers have nothing to go upon but the bare facts — and they stand in this way: Mr. Grahame was guardian to Lord Elfintower and his brother — this is known: it *is* known that Mr. Grahame was not well off before he married: it is *not* known how the Ernsford

Court property became so reduced after the death of Lord Elfintower's father —— ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ Oh, good heavens! it was the elections—all the county knows it.”

*Dowager.* “ But the whole of London does not: you forget that. *My* knowing it and saying it is of no use: *I* am interested on account of the connection . . . And really one cannot so much wonder at it, when (of course) they know nothing of the facts, and appearances favour the inuendoes they have heard; and, when they asked me, I, of course, could only give them a general contradiction . . . *I* know very well that it was not so; but when they see people connected by such a tie, and, *as* you say, so *nearly* related — when they see that they are apparently strangers, why, of course, it's of very little use for me to talk about elections. When the world once gets hold of a wrong impression, it will not give it up so easily —— ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* "—— but, as you are aware, there is a reason why Lord Elfintower . . . you are aware that Lord Elfintower — that Lord Elfintower — that Lord Elfintower ——"

*Dowager.* "I beg your pardon?"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "That Lord Elfintower ——"

*Dowager.* "I beg your pardon?"

*Mrs. Grahame.* ". . . a . . . I thought every one knew it."

*Dowager.* "Knew what?"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Well, I should never have named it — these things are very painful for a person of feeling to speak of. I am sure . . . I am sure I have had many a cry over it . . . I am sure you can feel for me."

*Dowager.* "I might if I knew what it was about."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Well, the fact is, that a long time ago — three years ago — when

they were mere children and didn't know their own minds, or not quite three years ago —— ”

*Dowager.* “ Who was a child three years ago ? ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ Well, she was not a child *then*, but she *had* been —— ”

*Dowager.* “ No doubt.”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ And she had gone on in that sort of childish way, of course —— ”

*Dowager.* “ Naturally, being a child. But I can't conceive why her having once been a child, like everybody else, should produce a coolness between you and Mr. Ernsford.”

*Mrs. Grahame* (in a feeble voice). “ But I . . . I . . . I thought you knew there had once been an engagement between —— ”

*Dowager* (with most courteous attention). “ I beg your pardon ? ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ . . . between Edith and —— ”

*Dowager.* “ I beg your pardon ? ”



*Mrs. Grahame.* " . . . And Edgar ——"

*Dowager.* "I beg your pardon?"

*Mrs. Grahame* (with the firmness of despair). " . . . And Lord Elfintower."

*Dowager* (with a courteous look of blank inquiry). "And you made her throw him over for my son, who was then the better match?"

*Mrs. Grahame* (feebly). "O . . . o . . . oh! you shouldn't put it in that way."

*Dowager* (not heeding her). "Exactly . . . Well, I don't so much blame Lord Elfintower and Mr. Ernsford for not liking *that* . . . I am afraid I can't give *that* out."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "It's very hard to be so misunderstood."

*Dowager* (still not heeding her). "I can't possibly give *that* out: I had better say nothing at all than *that*."

*Mrs. Grahame* (trembling with several different emotions). "It's all people's jealousy and ill-nature: they *must* know better."

*Dowager* (drily). "Perhaps."

*Mrs. Grahame* (in a surly grumble).  
"What's passed and gone is past and gone."

*Dowager*. "Clearly so: and we have to abide by it. But you have been singularly unfortunate: people would never have thought so much about it, if their attention had not been lately called to it in so marked a manner."

*Mrs. Grahame* (colouring and fidgeting).  
"I . . . I'm sure I can't tell how."

*Dowager* (very drily). "I think you will, on reflection. You will remember, that six weeks ago, you spoke of Mr. Ernsford to me and to several more people, in this house . . . You told us that he was Mr. Grahame's relative and ward, and that he and Lord Elfintower had been like sons to you. . . . Very well; these same people afterwards met you and him at several different houses, and observed that you seemed

to be quite strangers . . . You can't wonder that they talked about it. They *have* talked, and they will talk; and the thing is the more conspicuous, because Mr. Ernsford is a singularly promising young man, and has been remarked upon as such . . . I am very sorry . . . It will do you a good deal of harm . . . He is singularly promising . . . And Lord Elfintower is, I think, the most attractive person I ever saw . . . but I am afraid he will not live long . . . he looks dreadfully ill" (rising). "Well, I am sorry that I can't help you. Good morning."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I can assure you it was quite accidental."

*Dowager* (with exceeding dryness). "I daresay it was."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Quite so — it's very provoking . . . I'll write him a note, and ask him why he has been so harum-scarum,

and not been near us so long. Ha! ha! ha!  
Yes . . . of course I will —— ”

*Dowager.* “I should certainly recommend you to do so.” (*Exit.*)

*Mrs. Grahame.* “Nasty old thing!” (Sits down and writes:)

“My dear Rupert,—I am so sorry to have missed you so often lately, and what has become of you all this time? Will you go to church with us to-morrow? Yours affectionately, JEMIMA M. GRAHAME.”

While the acute Dowager was slowly forcing Mrs. Grahame to tell her what she already knew, the brothers were thus conferring together at home:

*Rupert.* “Then I start this evening at 7.30 . . . I wrote yesterday, to say that the dog-cart was to be at the station for that train. What day do *you* think of coming?”

*Lord Elfintower.* “I don’t see how I can leave town before the 25th. . . . Don’t you

mean to call on the Grahames before you go?"

*Rupert.* "No — not after the notice I have had to stay away . . . I told you . . ."

*Edgar.* "Yes—you did . . . I dare not advise you any more on the subject . . . I told you what I thought about it six weeks ago: more than that would be undue persuasion on such a subject. All I can say is This: Don't let your better instincts in the matter be obscured by misapprehension: don't take things for granted about it — for appearances are sometimes inconceivably deceitful."

*Rupert.* "I hear that Molini is in London — you remember him at Rome: I thought of calling on him this afternoon — his studio is somewhere down by Warwick Square — I've got his direction in my pocket. Will you come?"

They went to the studio, found their Roman friend at home, and after saluta-

tions and mutual inquiries, began looking at his pictures.

"By the by," said Rupert, "there's a cousin of mine who would be a wonderfully fine model, if you can get her to sit to you . . . There's none such in this country — at least, not that I have ever seen."

"Perhaps *you* can persuade her," suggested Molini, who was quick in perception, ready in supposition, and fertile in resources.

"Well, the fact is, I am going out of town this evening," answered Rupert, changing colour at the consequences of the information he had inadvertently given.

It being evident that this excuse was not construed literally by the person to whom it was addressed, and probable, from the expression of his countenance, that a consequent answer was coming, Rupert added, hurriedly, and at random :

"But you know Lady Ravensdale — don't you ?"

"Lady Ravensdale? — Bionda-con capelli d'oro — Yes, I do," answered Molini. "By the by, I am now finishing a small portrait of her: it is in the other room: I will show it to you directly."

"Well, it's her sister — Miss Grahame, that I mean . . . ask Lady Ravensdale," stammered Rupert, quite disconcerted at this unlooked-for verification of a random guess.

"Yes," continued Molini, "and I should not be surprised to see her here to-day for a sitting — very soon, in fact, if she comes at all: she said four o'clock, and it wants but five minutes of it."

The expression of Lord Elfintower's countenance at this announcement evidenced that time had done very little, and the habit of meeting less, or nothing, towards healing the wound received at Carlsbad. Had the artist observed him, he would very likely have arrived at very wrong conclu-

sions. Rupert upset the nearest chair with a jerk rather too strong to be accidental, but caught it as it fell, and set it down with vigorous gentleness.

"Have you picked up any amateur models lately?" asked Lord Elfintower, in a voice that was firm but not natural.

"None so good as you and your brother," answered Molini, with that kind of frankness which carries conviction captive. "None so good — nor am I likely to do so . . . I want you both to sit to me again — I know you will . . . By the by, there is a little sketch here that I had almost forgotten — done principally from recollection, and partly from a pencil sketch. I would give anything to know who the original is; but I can't find out . . . she is very handsome and remarkable looking: I made her into a sketch of Francesca da Rimini — she is made on purpose for it — it is just the expression of her countenance. I wish I



could find out who she is . . . I saw her about a month ago in — in . . . what do you call that place with the large trees? . . . Let me see . . . Kensington Gardens — that's it — Kensington Gardens."

This conjunction of time, place and appearances made Rupert strangely anxious to know more. He began playing nervously with a portfolio that lay on the ground near him. Molini picked up the portfolio, took from it the sketch, and put it on an unoccupied easel. It was the same face that Rupert had seen a month before at the same time and place. The whole scene, or rather succession of scenes, passed vividly before him: Mr. Grahame's butler unwillingly saying "not at home" — Constance's horse at the door, and Lord Sevenoaks riding round the square — the galop — the sudden revulsions of feeling — the reverie — the sudden shying of his horse — the dismounting, picking up the

child's hat, giving it to the lady and seeing her drive off—the feeling of painful admiration that remained on his mind when she was gone—all passed before him with distinctness as he looked at the sketch.

“Do you know anything of her?” said the artist, who on professional grounds made a practice of watching people's countenances. Perhaps *you* can tell me . . . . that is, if . . . . but perhaps you had *rather not!*”

“I'll tell you all I know—which is just nothing at all,” said Rupert, changing his position a little hastily. “I remember to have seen a very handsome woman in Kensington Gardens, as I was riding by, about a month ago; and she was like that sketch. I have not the slightest idea who she is.

“*Ahi! crudo amor! ma tu allor più m'informe  
A seguir d'una fera che mi strugge  
La voce e i passi e l'orme.*”

quoted Molini, as he rummaged in a corner

for an old frame to put Francesca da Rimini in. "How did you happen to take such particular notice of her, when you were only riding by?"

"And how did *you* happen to take such particular notice of her, when you were only walking by?—such particular notice, that you take her picture on the spot? Are we not, both of us, likely people to be caught staring at anything beautiful?"

While Molini was weighing in his own mind the practical value of this *tu quoque* argument, a carriage was heard to drive up; and a minute after Edith entered the room.

She entered the room with the easy assurance which marks—no, which used to mark, a woman of the world; but she was visibly altered since her last sitting. She was paler than could be warranted by the moderately late hours she had kept; yet it was not the pallor of illness that obscured the natural brilliancy of her complexion;

it was a fluctuating dimness of hue, hovering and beclouding her cheek, rather than resting upon and tingeing it—it was the hue which indicates that the affections are out of order and the bodily health struggling successfully against it.

She entered the room with all her natural and acquired ease of manner, and with as much gracefulness as had survived her memorable ride at Carlsbad—I mean as much as remains when the source is dried. Her manner, at its worst, was charming.

“I am really ashamed of having delayed so long,” she began to say, with a faint laugh, as she walked up to Molini. “I was so ashamed, when I met you, the day before yesterday, at \* \* \* House, that I hid behind Mrs. ——”

She saw Lord Elfintower—turned paler than before, and faltered in her address. Immediately afterwards she caught sight of the sketch, and her cheek flushed hotly.

She turned quickly, and fixed her eyes on it with an expression that would have sent Molini's conclusions wandering still farther out of the right road, had he observed it. But the act had been simultaneous with the look, and Edith was a little in front of him, facing the same way, so that he lost, at the same moment:

1st. A countenance to place among his sketches of fugitive expressions which helped him so much in idealising on his models.

2ndly. A misapprehension to place among the collection of errors touching England and the English, which, in spite of long and vehement preparatory lectures on the subjects from Rupert in Italy, he had been accumulating in his mind, with the help of an American friend, ever since landing at Folkestone in the month of May.

As it was, he only saw her scrutinising the sketch, and supposing that she wished to know something about it, began to say,

“È un abozzo ch’io —”

“Who and what is this? I *must* know,” interrupted Edith, who was too much off her guard, for the moment, to notice that he had begun to explain: “I *must* know — I will — that is, I have a great *curiosity* to know . . . I . . . I remember to have seen her at the Opera . . . at least I fancy it’s the same . . . but I am not so sure — not at all so sure, when I look closer at it —”

“That is just what I wish to know, and cannot find out,” replied Molini. “No one can tell me . . . I saw her in Kensington Gardens . . . with a child — a little boy about five years old.”

Edith made one or two complimentary remarks about the sketch, and the subject died out in as many minutes.

By about the same time Rupert found that, in order to be in time for the half-past seven o’clock train, it was necessary for him and his brother to go home at once.

"I really *must* go if I am to be off by that train," said he; "and I ought to arrange with you before I go about . . . about . . . what I've got to do."

Lord Elfintower construed these words as literally as a mind painfully absorbed is likely to do, if it receives the sound of them at all. They left the studio together, and walked at a quick pace towards home.

Before they had gone three hundred yards Lord Elfintower stopped suddenly, clung for a few seconds to an area railing, and then walked on again unsteadily, as though suffering from giddiness. His face was pale, with a shadow over it.

"Good God! what's the matter with you?" said Rupert: "this is the third time I have seen you come over as if you were faint, and turn pale . . . And yesterday you were knocked up by one canter — the mare pulling hardly at all. I ought to have insisted on your seeing the doctor —

*you* must come with me there at once — this sort of thing won't do at all — it isn't *like* you — I ought to have seen to it before, instead of being put off from it. Hi! cab ——”

“I do not want a cab, my dear fellow,” said Lord Elfintower, giving a shilling to the hailed cabman as he drew up. “I had much rather walk . . . It's all nothing at all: I am well enough . . . and as to the mare, that new boy had put a light snaffle on her by mistake; and she pulled my arms off.”

“That's all very well,” answered Rupert; “but you used to be able to do more than nine men out of ten . . . You are not as strong or as well as you ought to be . . . as you used to be ——”

“Nor ever *shall* be again:” said the other, firmly, but with a slight touch of sadness in the tones of his voice, and a momentary expression of lingering regret in his countenance.



"Curse them all!" said Rupert between his teeth, his brow darkening and contracting.

They walked on silently for ten minutes more, by which time they were nearly half-way up Grosvenor Place; Rupert having, in his excitement and his abstraction, increased the speed to rather over five miles an hour. Suddenly he became aware of it, and fell back, almost with a jerk, to less than one third of the pace.

"You needn't do that," said his brother: "I am all right again." Rupert gave an inarticulate kind of growl, and increased his pace by about a quarter of a mile an hour. They walked on silently for ten minutes more, by which time they were in Piccadilly—nearly opposite Clarges Street, or Bolton Street. Rupert turned to cross.

"Where are you going to?" said Lord Elfintower.

Rupert went on and made no reply.

"Hallo! Rupert—where are you going?" said Lord Elfintower.

Rupert stopped in the middle of the crossing, and, turning round, looked straight before him, without saying a word. After standing so for a second or two, he turned round again and continued his course, saying:

"Why, of course, to Doctor ——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lord Elfintower. "I won't hear of it. . . . Besides, you'll be too late if we do."

"What do I care about being late?" answered Rupert, gruffly. "Won't to-morrow morning do as well? Won't *any* time do as well? Do you suppose I am going to ——"

"Nonsense!" repeated Lord Elfintower, with a laugh that imitated nature very fairly; "I tell you, I'll go and see him to-morrow morning — upon my honour I will. *Do* come back. It is important that

one or other of us should be at Ernsford by Monday morning. If you don't go by this train, I must."

"If you will really see him to-morrow morning, well and good," said Rupert, recrossing Piccadilly; "but mind you do — will you, now?"

"I have promised you that I would."

"Yes, I know you have; but ——"

"But what?"

Rupert walked on some twenty yards further, and then said, in a low voice,—

"Well — nothing. I know you will do it when you say you will. But it's too important a thing to joke about. It's everything to me."

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE half-past seven o'clock train had left London about two hours, and Lord Elfin-tower was at the Opera, in the same stall as on a previous occasion, described in a former chapter.

Again a goodly assemblage of people were sitting in their boxes or elsewhere, talking, spying, envying, despising, sorrowing, rejoicing, boring, enjoying, loving, hating, laughing, crying, striving, contriving, pushing, wishing, hoping, foreboding, fearing, suspecting. Meanwhile, the fallen curtain flapped heavily in the draught, and the contrabassi stood up alone, inanimate sentries of the deserted orchestra. And Edith's box was filled as before; and she

paid as little attention to the same amount of homage ; and her eyes were fixed on a point at the opposite side of the house, as before.

But it was not the same point ; it was at the stalls — it was where the slapping fine woman had once before supposed her to have been looking. Her eyes were fixed ; her cheeks were pale — or rather dimmed — for the translucent rose-hue showed faintly through its impalpable super-covering. She answered listlessly, and kept up a desultory talk at half-attention, till the orchestra was refilled, and Mr. Costa's magic wand again converted some ninety instruments into one vast and all-obedient machine.

Another hour passed ; the second act was over, and the third act was beginning. Edith turned rather suddenly to one of the fifteen men who were in her box, and said—

“ You know Lord Elfintower ? I wish

you would go and tell him to come here. Thank you very much."

The young gentleman thus singled out did not happen to know Lord Elfintower; and, unlike most of his contemporaries, was shy. He hesitated, and, looking as though he wished to remonstrate, tried feebly to gain her attention; but Edith had, in the meantime, totally abstracted from her eyes the faculty of reflecting his, and only repeated very civilly, but no less decisively,

"Thank you very much."

"But I—I—you see, I don't exactly know him," urged the hobbledehoy.

"Yes, down there in the third row of stalls. Thank you," replied Edith, inexorably averting her head, and looking through her opera-glass at an opposite box.

Of course the hobbledehoy delivered his message somehow or other. Of course

Lord Elfintower came in consequence of such a message.

As soon as the hobbledehoy had left the box, Edith said,—

“I wonder who it is in that box — about the middle of the first tier — nearly opposite here? I have seen her here three or four times, in different boxes, and always alone. I have a great curiosity to know who she is . . . I daresay some of you could find out with a little trouble. It's very absurd of me to care to know . . . It's mere idle curiosity . . . I shouldn't know her name if I were to hear it — or anything about her. But I should like to know — it's so mysterious to see her always alone.”

Four, out of the fourteen men that remained after the departure of the hobbledehoy, immediately volunteered to go and find out; and they left the box at once on that errand. As they shut the door, Edith looked vaguely round the box.

"You can tell me the result of your inquiries by-and-by, at Lady Rossden's," she remarked, with significant emphasis, simultaneously abstracting from her eyes the faculty of reflecting the remaining ten pairs.

Two more out of the ten felt suddenly convinced that they knew some one who could tell them who the strange and solitary beauty was ; the remaining eight gradually disappeared — they could not tell why, but by some means or other they were caused to disappear ; so that, when Lord Elfin-tower entered the box, he found there no one but Edith. The hobbledehoy did not return.

They were startled by the expression of each other's countenances : they shuddered on the visible brink of their own heart-depths. They spoke not a word — they remained motionless, with looks averted.

After many seconds had passed, Edith



made a slight movement with a visible effort, and, in a voice quivering with every emotion that a bad husband and a prior attachment can produce in a mind that has not accepted the fate it has chosen, pronounced the word —

“Edgar.”

Lord Elfintower started at the sound. For an instant the colour glowed back healthily into his cheeks, and his pulses beat strong and almost evenly. That name, unheard from her lips during three long years — years separated from the previous time, as it were, by a black curtain, brought back for an instant — an instant only, a vision of the far-off past: for an instant — an instant only — he saw her as she was when he lifted her from her horse at Carlsbad, and the lock of golden hair fell over his shoulder.

For an instant only. A moment afterwards his face was more deadly white than

before, and he shook in every nerve. He saw her as she was when he met her at the cross-roads, and the lock of golden hair, blown by the fresh breeze, fluttered within a few inches of Lord Ravensdale. He recalled himself with an effort to the actual reality, and saw her as she now was. He faltered in the simple monosyllable that acknowledged her having addressed him.

Edith rose, as by a sudden impulse, and, throwing herself into the chair which was just behind her, silently inclined her face forward and half-raised, as if vaguely indicating some person in some opposite box.

"There," she said at length, "there, in that box opposite, half concealed by the curtain — I know who she is — the same who was the model for Francesca da Rimini — the same that I saw and *he* recognised as we came from church on my wretched wedding-day; the same that — that *has* been and is — I see her here con-

tinually alone, and in the park, driving alone — at least with . . . That's her opposite . . . there — there — there ! Edgar, you *are* — indeed you are avenged — at least you would be, if you cared to feel that you are. I — I am hopelessly miserable. I — am — so — by my own fault. I have nothing to look to — I am utterly careless of everything. Nothing can make me more wretched, more broken-hearted than I am. But — but — but look there — over there ! Any one of the many people who hate, despise, or envy me may be gratified fully ; they may see humiliation — public humiliation and insult ; and they may guess the interior life — it matters not to me : it is not new. I have known this since my wedding-day ; I have been made to feel, nearly ever since, that I was of less importance than a billiard-cue or a retriever puppy ; but to all that I am totally indifferent. I cannot be more mise-

nable than I became by my own wicked weakness at Carlsbad. It is only in appearance that the scene opposite — there — in that box — it is only in appearance that it aggravates what cannot be aggravated. But it does, and *will do* so, in the eyes of all the people who envy me (God knows for what!), and in the eyes of the people who envy my mother for having got on in society quicker and better than they — than those who had no qualifications whatever for it. It will be a real pleasure to them — a triumph for malignity. It is right, very right that I should be humiliated — but I am too wretched to feel it.”

“ You *are* miserable — and — and — so am I:” said Lord Elfintower in a low voice to himself, and in spite of himself; “ *We are* miserable. We must accept it — accept it — and it will be accepted. This world of suffering passes very soon.”

Edith turned away her head, and burst into a passion of weeping that convulsed her whole frame. It was well that she was sitting far back in the box, and that the third act had just begun. She leaned over the back of her chair, and, extending her right hand, put it into his. Lord Elfintower bent over it, and a groan of bitter agony burst from his lips.

“Then you have not hated me as I deserved — as every one except such an angel as you would have done?” said Edith, almost inaudibly. “You — you — still ——”

Lord Elfintower pressed her hand convulsively to his lips. Tears—things unknown to his childhood—rolled down his fevered cheeks, and, drying where they rolled, scarred the traces of their course visibly.

He rose to his feet suddenly, and by a tremendous effort. She looked round, and,

catching a glimpse of his face, shuddered at the change wrought in him, — wrought even since he had entered the box. He rose suddenly to his feet by a tremendous effort, and repeated slowly, as if impressing the sense of the words upon his own convictions—

“We must accept it; and it will be accepted.”

“Yes,” said Edith, in a voice that was inarticulate from sobbing; “pray that *I* may accept it. . . . I cannot pray, or hope, or——”

She broke off in the middle of the sentence, threw a lace mantilla over her face, and, putting on her opera-cloak without waiting to tie the string, opened the door, and took Lord Elfintower’s arm.

Mario was singing. They passed through the passages, crush-room, and down the staircase, without delay. Her footman had seen her, and found the carriage by the

time they reached the entrance: scarcely two minutes had elapsed since they left the box. The carriage steps were let down; her hand trembled in his for a moment. She lingered on the steps, and said in a low voice:

“Shall I set you down? I think it has been raining.”

A shiver passed through him; but he remained where he was.

Another moment: the carriage was rolling away, and he was walking up the Haymarket, beset by all those repulsive sights and sounds which do their best to obliterate from the mind the pictures that beauty in art and nature may have drawn there.

He neither saw nor heard. There was that within him which shut out all but itself: there was a tempest in his heart which lacerated it, but bore him strongly onwards by its force. Thus he reached home.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE next morning Lord Elfintower fulfilled his promise of seeing the doctor; and he had need to do so. When he rose, his muscles seemed to have lost their power of tension; at intervals he breathed with difficulty; and when he attempted to move quickly about the room as usual he felt as if suffocating, and at last fell to the ground, insensible.

"It's up with me:" he said to himself, as he rose from the ground, after lying there a minute or two. "It's up with me. . . . I thought it would come to this. . . . Well, I believe I have nothing to arrange. The law will give it as I should by Will had I the



power to make one. . . . Rupert knows, and will have everything. . . . I wish I could know first about Constance. . . . If *that* is not to be, he will never turn out what he might be. . . . But it will soon be in a fair way to be cleared up. . . . If that poor, foolish self-deceiver, Mrs. Grahame, is again doing unlimited mischief conscientiously, as I believe she did before, the problem will, I think, be in the way of solution before many days are out ; for it is up with me now—I can feel that it is ; last night has finished me. . . . It is better so. God only knows how much longer I . . . she might have resisted. It was almost more than human nature could bear. . . . Thank God it *was* borne—thank God it was.”

He staggered and fell again, but more heavily than before. This time he lay quite senseless for many minutes. After some time had elapsed, he recovered his consciousness, though still dizzy and gasping for breath.

He struggled to rise from the floor, but for a long time ineffectually—each attempt producing the same result as before. So passed the time—a long time—till at length the attack appeared to wear off, and he recovered sufficiently to rise with effort, and dress slowly.

Still he felt as if his limbs had lost their strength: moreover, the heart seemed to have become unsteady in its place, and too small for the space it had to fill.

Altogether, the vigour of life seemed to have gone out of him; the spring was dried up, and the stagnant, diminishing supply only remained.

In two or three hours he recovered still more—so much that he was able to walk to the doctor's house.

"I am not much worse now than I was yesterday afternoon," he thought; "but it's all up with me, though. I feel that the slightest thing would bring it on again.

And a few more such, or one stoppage of the heart a little too long—and there's an end of me. Poor Rupert! It will be a real blow to him—that's the only harm I know of it."

The doctor looked at him for a few seconds with much attention, almost with curiosity, and said :

" You ought not to be in this state ; your constitution is as sound as a bell ; both in frame and interior you are made for strength, and activity and endurance. I'll tell you what it is—for you are not a man to shirk or be afraid of the truth : You must take very serious care of yourself—there's no blinking the question. You must, or——"

" My life will not be worth a month's purchase—I know it," said Lord Elfin-tower, very calmly ; " perhaps not worth a week's purchase. My own opinion is that nothing can save me now ; and I only come

for advice because I promised my brother to do so."

"No, not so bad as that:" answered the doctor. "Only be careful, and . . . The fact is, the mind is exclusively the cause of it; and if you can make that as it was before, you may, with some care and attention, be as you were before."

"Then I need take up your time no longer," said Lord Elfintower, rising to go. "If that is all that can be done, as in fact I thought all along——"

"No, no; you are in too great a hurry," answered the doctor. "I *can* do something for you. Besides which, you are not by any means in the state you suppose. I only cautioned you."

He wrote a prescription, held it in an absent manner in his hand for about a minute, and rising from his chair, said, as he gave it to Lord Elfintower:

"Now, this prescription is *not* humbug,

any more than it's a panacea. It positively will relieve you, and assist Nature to do its work; more than that nothing will do. If Nature will not assist herself—in other words, if your mind does not rise out of its present state, that prescription can only be a palliative and a postponer; but if your mind *does* rise out of the kind of moral malaria which depresses it, then that medicine will assist materially in bringing round the clockwork inside you. . . . One thing more I would recommend. It's the old story—the old hackneyed piece of advice in such cases as yours; but it's nevertheless as unchangeably true, in its way, as Solomon's proverbs: Go out of this country—go abroad . . . somewhere—I don't very much care where, so long as the atmosphere is clear and light. Go as soon as you conveniently can—within the next month or six weeks, if you can; and I should like to see you once more before

you leave town—you had better leave town as soon as possible.”

Lord Elfintower walked slowly home, and threw himself into an armchair, exhausted.

“It’s no use,” he said to himself; “I’m done for . . . a little more or a little less of a short remaining time, and that’s all. . . . I should like to get back to the old place. . . . But Rupert is to come back here on Tuesday; and it’s important that he should stay three or four days, for I *cannot* do the business *now*. . . . I’ll start (please God!) on Tuesday, cross him on the road, and leave him a note.”

He left London on Tuesday morning, having written the following note, which was to be given to Rupert when he should arrive:—

“My dear Rupert,—

“I went to see the doctor, as I promised to do. He gave me a prescription, and

told me to leave town ; so I start to-morrow morning. You must, therefore, do the business here for me. I suppose it will take you three or four days—not more ; so that on Saturday, at latest, you will be back at Ernsford, where you will find

“ Your affectionate brother,

“ **ELFINTOWER.**”

## CHAPTER XV.

THE next day Rupert returned to London, and found, instead of his brother, an explanatory note from him, as given at the end of the last chapter.

He glanced at it, and was on the point of going back at once to Ernsford Court ; but he read it through, and its tone seemed so reassuring that he felt as if relieved from a great weight of care.

Among the letters of different kinds that lay upon the table, was the note written by Mrs. Grahame, under the influence of the acute Dowager.

The reader may perhaps remember that it ran as follows :

“ My dear Rupert,— I am sorry to have



missed you so often lately, and what has become of you all this time? will you go to church with us to-morrow?

“Yours affectionately,

“JEMIMA M. GRAHAME.”

“A hospitable invitation,” observed Rupert to himself, as he put down the note. “Perhaps she supposes that I never go to church . . . This must have come last Saturday, just after I left . . . What can have caused her to make this awkward and unnatural sort of recognition suddenly? Well, I’ll go and see if they’re at home now; then I shall have done everything—and rather more.”

In certain states of mind we simultaneously court and aggravate a suitable grievance, even though it subtend a train of evils: we chide delay in the verification of that grievance, even though the mind be all the while coursed by an undercurrent of regret—the germ of self-reproach

secretly and slowly growing up under the partial shade of self-deception, and the truer instincts not altogether hushed by the pulse-beating of morbid expectation.

Pretty much in this state of mind, Rupert walked to Grosvenor Square, and turned away from the house when he found it shut up. The fact of their having left town seemed to him—not a probable, or possible explanation of Mrs. Grahame's curious invitation, but an aggravation of its probable insincerity. In short, there being two probabilities belonging to the fact—the one favourable, the other unfavourable—he totally rejected the former, and distorted the latter, with the tacit approval of his unexamined conscience.

He knocked at the door: he wished to feel quite sure—though of what, he would have been puzzled to say, if cross-examined: however he knocked, that he might feel quite sure of something—and the para-

sitical super-conscience lauded him for large-mindedness in the matter.

A maid-servant came to the door, when the following dialogue, and consequent monologue ensued:

*Rupert* (with a defensive and not quite inoffensive expression of countenance). "Is Mrs. Grahame at home?"

*Maid-servant* (a charwoman hired for the day "to help clean up"—N.B. not very sober). "Hout of town."

*Rupert*. "Where to?"

*Charwoman*. "Don't know nothink where they're gone to, which I'm only here t' help clean hup and that" (shuts the door).

*Rupert* (solus). "That infernal note was just what I thought—an awkward attempt to appear civil, and keep me away, at the same time. . . Could she have acted like this, if Constance had not been of the same mind? 'Contra miglior voler voler mal pugna.' . . . It would be childish to suppose that she could."

With this reflection, by which he manifested (to his own satisfaction) how much he knew about domestic ethics, he went home, dressed, dined, and went to the Opera, where he had the pleasure of "assisting" at the representation of some very energetic music of the modern cosmopolitan school, enriched by processions of horses and other animals from Astley's, three military bands, forty trumpeters, a drinking chorus with accompaniment of glasses and a big drum, an eclipse of the moon, and a tame kangaroo.

His after-impression of what he had seen and heard on entering the stalls was something like the following :



A loud crash of brass instruments — then

a pause of five minutes, and a clap of thunder.



Simultaneously a descriptive dance of ghouls, and a prayer sung by the soprano.

"The opera's going to the devil," grumbled he to an acquaintance when the first act was over.

"What's the matter with this one?" answered the young gentleman, turning round and looking hard to his front. "I think it's capital. I never saw anything better done than that eclipse of the moon . . . and the drinking song too."

"Stunning," remarked another, who was of a more taciturn disposition.

"That's just what I complain of," said Rupert drily, as he began a file firing from his opera-glass along the boxes.

"There's such a wonderful breadth in it," said another, who had derived the expression from a newspaper criticism on some other opera.

"Ah! that's what gives it so much weight," suggested the ubiquitous Sir John Campion, coming into the stalls. "I thought you were at Ernsford."

"I did go there," answered Rupert, "but I had to come back on some business. My brother is there; and I am going back in two or three days."

Sir John was silent for a minute or two, and an extraordinary expression of seriousness came over his countenance. "Take care of him," he said, as he turned to go. "If I had had such a brother as you have got, I believe I should . . . have had a better chance, at any rate."

Rupert did not hear what he said: he was looking attentively at a box on the pit tier. In the box was a lady—the lady

whom he had seen in Kensington Gardens, and Molini had sketched from memory. While he was looking, the second act began with a duet between the octave flute and the cymbals.

The second act over, Rupert again levelled his opera-glass at the box, or rather at the mysterious lady in it. After he had looked for a minute or two, he saw the door open, and a man enter and speak to the lady, remaining all the while at the back of the box. Rupert screwed his opera-glass backwards and forwards, till at length, by dint of much sight-straining and a little imagination, he recognised or thought he recognised Sir John Champion.

Having "convictions" potent to the verge of exclusiveness, respecting the lyric drama, and having had these convictions much offended in the course of that evening, he resolved to leave the theatre before the third act should commence; and ac-

cordingly, when the orchestra began to fill, he began to move slowly out of the stalls: but simultaneously began a perplexity.

He required things that were by no means adapted for combination: 1st, to avoid hearing the third act; 2nd, to be somewhere inside the theatre at the moment when the mysterious lady should leave her box; 3rd, to avoid attracting attention whilst waiting about for the above purpose; 4th, to find out who the mysterious lady was; 5thly, to insure desideratum No. 4 without letting any one know that he wanted the information he sought.

The result was thoroughly disproportionate to the comprehensiveness of the scheme: the five desiderata — remained so.

First he went to the refreshment room, when he found himself the solitary central object of half-a-dozen idle pairs of eyes: he ate three ices, and then sat bravely in his



chair for ten minutes longer, doing nothing, and feeling himself to be as much. But from this retreat he was at length fairly beaten out by the persistent roundness of the half-dozen idle pairs of eyes.

He strolled through the empty crush-room, and, walking down-stairs, as upon the fiction of looking for a carriage, narrowly escaped having to pay again on his return. He went back into the refreshment room, and ordered a fourth ice, which from the ordering to the last mouthful (included) disposed of seven minutes and a half more—making altogether about half an hour since the commencement of the third act: but again the persistent roundness of the half-dozen idle pairs of eyes proved to be too much for him, and drove him away within five minutes of the last spoonful. He walked along the passages of three different tiers in succession; but this plan had the twofold disadvantage of causing him

to be eyed with suspicion by the box-keeper, whilst it did not much prevent his hearing the music.

No alternative now remained but to return to the stalls, and wait there, ready to start again before the curtain should have fallen half-way to the stage. He placed himself just within the door, and remained till the curtain began to descend; when he ran out, and almost before it had touched the boards of the stage, he reached the spot near which was the mysterious lady's box—taking up his position there, much tormented by the apprehension that the whole house was watching him. Here he stayed till the boxes had apparently given forth all their occupants; but the mysterious lady was not among them. He paced up and down, scanning the features of every lady who came out of any box within twenty paces of the bend of the house, where her box was situated; but there was no one at

all like her to be seen. He walked quickly back to the stalls, feeling all the while as if the stall-keeper knew what he was thinking of: every box was empty. The mysterious lady must actually have gone away whilst he was taking refuge from the half-dozen idle pairs of eyes.

He hurried away, hoping that she might be still waiting for her carriage; and, in fact, just as he reached the bottom of the stairs, he caught sight of Sir John Campion standing by the entrance with a lady on his arm. The lady's face was not visible; but the dress, height, and figure (so far as it could be seen under her opera-cloak) corroborated the supposition that she was the mysterious lady. Rupert made his way as quickly as possible through the crowd, congratulating himself on the probability that the link-man would soon give him further information on the subject—which he did almost immediately, in the following pithy

sentence: "Lady Goodwin's carriage stops the way."

Rupert went straight to his club, and sat down to the study of Burke's Peerage, and the Court Guide. In the former he read to himself as follows:

"Goodwin, Sir Henry. Hm . . . hm . . . hm, and so forth . . . What's this? Sir Henry Holofernes, born 17—m. 18—Sarah, daughter of Sir Joseph Campion, Bart.

"Campion—let's see what that says . . . Campion. Hm—hm—m . . . So and so, and so and so. Sarah, born—No: that's not it: she must be thirty years less than that. Let's see if there's another Lady Goodwin . . . Hm—m—m. Sir Frederic, nephew of the above—born. 18—m. 18—and so forth, died 18—

"So he died three years ago, and six after he married. That's it."

He opened the Court Guide at two different places, and read :

“ Goodwin, Lady, 140, Cadogan Place . . ”

“ Cadogan Place, N°. one, two, three, four, and so forth. Hm—m——140, Lady Goodwin. Miss Hannah Twinbriggles. Who is Miss Twinbriggles? Oh, it’s a blunder—she had the house before, or something of that sort.”

No further researches could be made that night, but he was resolved to solve the problem the next day; which he did as soon as he had finished, for the day, the business on account of which he had come to London.

He took a Hansom, and boldly told the driver to go to 140, Cadogan Place; but becoming gradually impressed with the awkwardness of being set down at the door of a total stranger, and the impossibility of calling there without having some reason to offer for so doing, he stopped at Gunter’s

in Motcombe Street, and resorted to his last night's contrivance for gaining time—an ice.

Having finished his ice, and sketched a very confused plan of action, he walked slowly to Cadogan Place; but there a new difficulty arose—What were his chances of obtaining any information by walking up and down the pavement? He did walk up and down however, though every window seemed to him peopled with heads, and every head illumined by a thousand idle pairs of eyes, all concentrated upon his countenance. He walked up and down, till the idle pairs of eyes that his fancy had conjured up were becoming too much for him, as the real ones had done on the preceding night; when, just as he was turning away in despair, a light seemed to break through the mist, in the form of a visitor knocking at the door, which was about forty yards from where he was at that moment.

But the light, like a glow-worm, grew dim when he came close to it, leaving him no further advanced in his search than he had been before. He approached the doorsteps, with the intention of asking the lady whether Lady Goodwin lived there—if indeed she did not turn out to be Lady Goodwin herself, as he secretly hoped she might. With this view he walked rapidly towards the house—looking neither right nor left, but fully prepared to turn round, as on a sudden recollection of something, and, taking off his hat with all courtesy, either ask the important question, or read the answer in the lady's lineaments, as the case might turn out. He did so—and the lady, like the veiled prophet of Khorassan, pulled up her veil just as he turned round. Truly the consternation of Zelica could scarcely have been greater than his. The lady's features were harsh and ill-proportioned, her hair neutral-tinted, her feet very large and flat,

her ancles thick, her diameter and circumference equal all the way.

The door opened, and she walked in.

Rupert mused long and deeply respecting her vocation, and finally arrived at the conclusion that she was a Pre-Raphaelite model.

Whilst all this was taking place, he had walked up and down so many times that a policeman had begun to eye him with professional curiosity, and it was becoming advisable either to knock at the door or go away altogether. But at this moment propitious fortune placed another chance in his way. A brougham came to the door; the mysterious lady was evidently going out in that brougham. He hung about near the carriage, and watched the house; in return for which the policeman hung about and watched him. A footman opened the door, and stood on the steps—watching, or seeming to watch, Rupert as suspiciously as



the policeman. Rupert experienced a strange longing to pass down the little round hole through which the coals are poured in. At length, when it was fast becoming impossible to stay there any longer without the risk of being taken up as a pickpocket, the footman came out and opened the carriage door. Rupert looked up furtively ; but instead of the mysterious lady, he saw the Pre-Raphaelite model, and another of a severer countenance, who disconcerted him more than he had yet been disconcerted during the adventure : she disconcerted him, not by fixity of gaze, but by a serious twinkle.

A dreadful suspicion now flashed across his mind. Could one of those two be the other Lady Goodwin—the widow of Sir Holofernes ? He went into the nearest bookseller's and asked for a Court Guide, wherein he read as before : 140, Lady Goodwin : Miss Hannah Twinbriggles—

but nothing about any other Lady Goodwin.

A sudden and bold idea now came into his head: he returned to the house, and knocked. A maid servant of the same pattern as the two ladies opened the door and looked at him austere.

"Another Pre-Raphaelite model:" thought he, amused at the resemblance, in spite of his repeated disappointments. "These people might really gain a small livelihood in that way.

"Is Lady Goodwin at home?" asked he, in some trepidation, lest she might, by some unlucky chance, have returned whilst he was gone to the bookseller's.

"Not at home," said the model sharply.

"Has she been gone out long?" said Rupert, emboldened by the assurance of not finding himself dragged *nolens volens* before the presence of Sir Holofernes's widow, to encounter the serious twinkle.

"She went out in the carriage, sir, about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago," replied the model in rather a softer tone—thinking, from his second question, that he really was a friend of her mistress's, though he did not look like one.

"Gone out with——?" suggested Rupert.

"Yes, sir, with Miss Twinbriggles," was the reply. "She'll be back, sir, directly. . . . There she is—that's the carriage coming round the corner. Will you——?"

Rupert turned and fled.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I don't care; I'll make one more attempt. I'll ask Campion, and make him introduce me:" said he half aloud in the excitement of his feelings, as he was turning from Pont Street into Chesham Place.

"Who to?" said a voice round the corner.

"I verily believe that you are in two

places at once, like Sir Boyle Roche's bird," said Rupert.

"Not an unlikely locality this, for one to be found in at five o'clock in July—is it?" answered Sir John. "But what can I do for you?"

"Why the fact is, I——I want you to introduce me to Lady Goodwin."

"Round the corner?" The devil you do! Are you in love with Miss Twinbriggles?"

"No, no; I mean . . . . the other . . . . who was at the opera last night."

"Come along, then; she's at Farrence's. But, if the question be not indiscreet (which, by the by, is quite unimportant to me), what makes you so anxious to know her?"

"Well—I saw her portrait as Francesca da Rimini; but the painter did not know who she was."

"As *what*?"

"As Francesca da Rimini."

"Either the painter was drunk, or you misunderstood him, or he mistook the name. But here we are; and you may judge for yourself. There she is, driving off. I'm afraid we're too late this time, unless you wish me to stop the carriage."

Rupert looked, and saw a neutral-tinted young woman, with a self-complacent mouth, round eyes, and face widening from the cheek-bone downwards.

"Shall I stop the carriage, and tell her you were particularly anxious to be introduced to her?" asked Sir John, looking very hard at him.

"No, no. Another time will do," answered Rupert hurriedly.

"That's your model for Francesca da Rimini?" continued Sir John.

"Of course not," answered Rupert, whose artistic principles were so scandalised by the imputation, that he spoke almost loud

enough for the lady to hear as she drove by.

"Well, *that* is Lady Goodwin," said Sir John very drily. "I can't do any more for you. How did the artist contrive to paint her, if he did not know who she was?"

"It was only a sketch from memory. He saw her walking in Kensington Gardens," answered Rupert.

"I'll tell you how it is," said Sir John, after a pause. "You are like a young bear: you have all your troubles before you. I wish I had had half as good a chance as you have—half as good as you seem inclined to throw away. I am off this evening by the train. My parting advice to you (and it's the most friendly and the most easily remembered) is this: Don't make yourself what God didn't make you—a d——d ass."

Rupert was secretly of opinion that he had already done so to a great extent ; and thus ended, for the present at any rate, his researches after the mysterious lady.

## CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN the Grahames had left town (as communicated to Rupert by the charwoman, and corroborated by the shutters) Edith had gone with them to Moorfield, there to remain till Lord Ravensdale should return from Norway, which he was expected to do in about a month.

On their way from the station, and just at or about that part of the parish road where they had met Edgar three years ago, and where Constance had crossed it three months sooner, when she rode to Ernsford Court at seven o'clock in the morning, a peal of bells from the village church of Ernsford became too audible to escape notice.



"What *are* they ringing about?" said Mrs. Grahame, with nervous carelessness.

No one volunteered a theory on the subject, nor was a word spoken during the remainder of the drive.

It was a gloomy party that arrived at Moorfield.

Mr. Grahame had a general impression that things in general were out of order — so much so that he omitted to visit his favourite hunter who was in physic preparatory to being got into condition. Mrs. Grahame felt, in spite of herself, much less self-confident than on a similar occasion three years before, though she had since attained the coveted object which then she had not even attempted. Edith was as one tempest-tossed on a cloud-capped sea. Constance was as one becalmed and beclouded.

Annoyance, like a swarm of gnats, hovered over Mrs. Grahame, stinging and irritating. It was sorrow that lay heavy

upon the hearts of her two daughters. Mrs. Grahame saw that she had over-reached herself; she saw that Edgar would have really been a better match than Lord Ravensdale—richer, because not extravagant—more important, because he had a thousand times the other's abilities, and was made to command respect and confidence. She saw this; and she saw that which, with all her indisputable sharpness, she had omitted to foresee, viz. that the awkwardness which her Carlsbad *coup d'état* made almost inseparable from their future intercourse with Lord Elfintower had now become a perennial evil clinging to Moorfield; and she saw, moreover, that the evil was even greater than she could have foreseen—greater in the ratio of Lord Elfintower's decupled fortune, the increased attraction of the provincial eyes to him and his, and the more frequent appearance of the county people at Ernsford Court.

But she did *not* see that she was now throwing away an opportunity, such as is seldom given,—that of partial atonement ; she did *not* see that such partial atonement would be positively advantageous, and its neglect positively injurious, in every point of view. She had gained nothing from experience : she was repeating herself.

Spuckers saw further ; and she took the privilege of thirty years' service to tell her so in her own racy manner. Mrs. Grahame became angry and menacing ; but Spuckers was an inherent and inseparable part of herself, and could not be suppressed. The best trait remaining in Mrs. Grahame's character was her affection for Spuckers.

A dialogue on the sore subject was commenced by Spuckers that evening at hair-brushing, in the following terms :

*Spuckers.* "Did you hear the bells a-ringing, 'm?"

Mrs. Grahame makes a backward move-

ment of the head, such as would have been productive of pin-scars, had the hair-brushing been hair-dressing.

*Spuckers* (persistently) — “. . . the bells a-ringing, 'm.”

*Mrs. Grahame* (curtly). “What bells?”

*Spuckers*. “The Ernsford bells, 'm.”

*Mrs. Grahame*. “H'm! I suppose they were practising.”

*Spuckers*. “No, 'm: they was ringing for my lord's birthday. And there's grand doings . . . all the tenantry, 'm, and that come to pay their respects, and they're so glad he's come among them again, for he was always so much beloved—he was.”

*Mrs. Grahame*. “Of course . . . there's nothing extraordinary in all that.”

*Spuckers*. “Well, 'm: they didn't do it to hus!”

*Mrs. Grahame* (with a sudden jerk). “You're very impertinent. . . . How you do pull my hair!”

*Spuckers.* "And the hold court is a-done up so beautiful."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I'm sure I wonder he doesn't live at the other place, that doesn't require any doing up."

*Spuckers.* "Why, Ernsford is the old family place—much holder and finer than the other: and there's Mr. Rupert, 'm ——"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Why *will* you pull so at my hair? One would think you had never done hair before."

*Spuckers.* "And he's been a-hasked to stand for Tedminster: and they say he's so wonderful clever: he'll be a hornament to the county: and they're afraid, 'm, that he'll be my Lord, which his Lordship, they say, has had very dangerous attacks: they say he took on so after he'd a been to Carlsbad, and he never got over it rightly, and lately he's a been much worse, which I heard all this from his man before we left London: yes 'm, and there's them that

say as he houghtn't to have been so, and there's them that say as they see\* Mr. Rupert was in love with Miss Constance, 'till you kep' him off, and (beg your pardon, 'm, I can't 'elp people a-talking) they say — ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ And pray who said all this impertinence ? ”

*Spuckers.* “ It wasn't nobody particular, ma'am.”

*Mrs. Grahame* (reddening even to the roots of her hair). “ Then what do you mean by telling me they did ? I shan't forget your impertinence, I can tell you : and I — ”

*Spuckers.* “ I didn't say nothink myself, 'm : it was the gentlefolks as talked so ! ”

*Mrs. Grahame* (thrown off her guard by this announcement). “ What do you mean ? who talked ? ”

*Spuckers.* “ Well, 'm, there was a many of

\* Præt. perf. Ed.

them. I only heard it from them as heard them when they was a-waiting at dinner and that: there's a deal heard, 'm, in that way."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "And pray who do they pretend to have heard? not that I want to know such gossip, picked up by scraps and not understood—"

*Spuckers.* "There was a many of them, ma'am. . . . It was only two days before we left London that Lady Julia Perrington was a laughing about it to three or four gentlemen at a party. I heard it from one of the men as handed round the coffee — James Brown, 'm, as was footman with us last year. . . ."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "And pray what more did they fancy they heard?"

*Spuckers.* "I — I shouldn't like to say, 'm, all I heard."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "H'm — m — m — m?"

"*Spuckers.* "Well 'm, I beg your pardon,

I'm sure, for repeating such words; but they weren't mine, nor those as told me."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "H'm — m — m — m?"

*Spuckers.* "They said, 'm (I don't like to tell you, only I've been so long in your service, 'm, and I can't help telling when anything is said about you as shouldn't be said."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "H'm — m — m — m?"

*Spuckers.* "They said, 'm (which I'm sure they houghtn't, and it's very disagreeable to me to repeat it) they said, 'm (begging your pardon, and I wish I hadn't got it to say) they said, 'm (which I'm sure I never thought to live to see the day that such things would be said) they said, 'm (if you really insist upon my telling) they said, 'm, as you didn't care for nothink but lords, which you hadn't been used to them, and you didn't know what a good match was if it hadn't got a title with it, and it was the hold story over again, which you



hadn't learnt no wisdom, and you'd over-reached yourself then, and you'd hact the same way now, and very likely over-reach yourself again, which it would serve you right if you did, and they said how odd it was ——"

*Mrs. Grahame* (rising abruptly, with dishevelled hair). "Get me some hot water."

*Spuckers*. "Please, 'm, I brought up plenty in the kettle."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "It isn't enough; and it's got cold."

Exit *Spuckers*, saying to herself, "If she's got the sense she was born with, she'll be civil to Mr. Rupert ——"

*Les grands esprits se touchent*. The reader may perhaps remember that the acute Dowager had expressed the same opinion a few days before.

## CHAPTER XVII.

IN the same room that had been hers before she married, Edith awoke the next morning, and found Constance standing by her bedside as formerly. She sprang out of bed, and turned readily to greet her sister — but not with the elastic movement which formerly told of equal hopefulness around the circle of life's horizon. The movement was hurried, yet heavy, anxious yet not expectant; it was the movement of one who struggles with a sorrow, and catches at straws. Constance was as sorrowful as her sister — perhaps more so, because she neither turned from it nor was buoyed up by illusions. She sorrowed for her own hopes, blighted as soon as raised — hopes

of happiness which few could realise as intensely as herself: she sorrowed for her sister's hopes, avoidably blighted — hopes whose loss was felt but not accepted.

Constance looked very grave; and, though her lips smiled obediently to the impulse of affection, her features showed that smiles were strangers to them. Edith gazed on her through a tear-mist, and said :

“ Here you are again, as in old times — coming to see me before I am up . . . Dearest Constance, you come, like a good spirit, whenever I have most need of you. Would to God I had listened to your advice ! If I had not made that one false step at Lady Sandown's, I should not gradually have lost the power of guiding myself — I should never have acted as I did after you left Carlsbad. The wretched triumph — or what I fancied was a triumph — that I didn't even find pleasure in then —— ”

"To look back is worse than useless," interrupted Constance, in the least gloomy tone she could assume. "You *must* not look back; if you do, you tempt Providence, when you need every defence — need more, perhaps, than you or I dream of."

"But if I had known what I was doing," said Edith, in a pleading tone, as though her sister had the power of undoing the deed that bound her — "if I had known ——"

"You *did* know. I told you — even at the last moment," answered Constance, shivering as she made the effort to say the words.

"But to be tied for life," continued Edith, in the same pleading tone. "The error of a moment ——"

"You had an interview with Edgar the same day," answered Constance, in a quivering monotone: "you had an inter-

view with him the next day; you heard of his journey to Cologne; you had five months to reconsider and recall what you had done—five months of daily, hourly opportunities; you had the warrant and dictation of your conscience to do so; you had warnings most solemn and distinct, even at the last moment—when I implored you to listen to them, and would myself have assumed the whole blame and responsibility of your doing so. All this was yours—yours to accept, and you refused it—yours to regain, and you rejected it. Everything favoured you. Of your own free will, without bias or even suggestion, you fixed your affections on one whom you had every possible opportunity of knowing, and *did* know thoroughly—who more than reciprocated it,—one who had every qualification to render you inconceivably happy: and you were not thwarted, hindered, or inter-

rupted, but, on the contrary, he was with you every day and all day, from the day of your engagement to the day he left Carlsbad: and you were not tired of him, but, on the contrary, you volunteered to tell me on the morning he left that you loved him more every day, and were every day happier than on the last: and after having cancelled all this in the space of one fortnight, you had still not committed yourself to another engagement—and Edgar was still at Cologne: and after that, you had four months more—and at the last moment I did all but drag you away from the altar. I know how you were led on, how you deceived yourself, how you have suffered since — *no one turns from evident happiness without strong temptation and strong self-delusion*: but for our own free acts each of us must, or ought to be, alone responsible — and none so justly as yourself, who had almost unparalleled

opportunities forced upon your notice. The duty of telling you this is a heart-breaking one — I would to God that any exertion or self-sacrifice on my part could remedy the evil! I know of none that I would not make at this very instant, to remedy it, for your sake and for his. But it would be cruel and wicked in me to do otherwise than impress upon you this actual truth: You cannot dwell upon the past with impunity — you must not even allow yourself the melancholy privilege of regret. You must only trust, and pray, and do your best.

“You don’t know what it is to love without hope,” said Edith, bursting into tears. “You don’t know what it is — you have never really suffered.”

“Constance’s brow clouded over for an instant.

“What have I done during the greater part of my life? What have I to expect for

the rest of it?" she said, in a low voice. "Suffering, either positive or negative, in the past, with one very short interruption; suffering worst of all, in the future. I only preach what I shall soon have to practise — without ever having had one opportunity of averting the calamity."

These words fell without meaning on Edith's ears, so absorbed was she by the contemplation of her own sorrow. Constance left the room, disappointed and disheartened.

So do we walk hand in hand as strangers.

\* \* \* \*

"I think, Jemima, that I'll ride to Ernsford this afternoon," said Mr. Grahame at luncheon.

Jemima did not commit herself to a reply; for her will in the matter was fluctuating, and she preferred leaving it to chance — reserving to herself the right of



interference, modification, substitution, inversion, subversion, or veto, as the occasion might require.

"Come along, Constance, and ride with me," whispered Mr. Grahame, under cover of a loud explosion from a soda-water bottle.

Before three o'clock they had gone through the gate at the end of the meadow that opened out into the parish road; and Mr. Grahame's spirits rose so high as they neared Ernsford Court, that he began to sing —

"Te voglio bene assaie  
E tu non piensi a me.

\* \* \*

Nenna, pecchè m'empieste?  
Dimmi che t'aggio fatto?"

interspersed with illustrations of the manners and customs of the Neapolitans, as observed by himself during his wedding tour.

There was a kind of homely pathos in the transparency of his simple stratagem, which made Constance smile sadly. His sly whisper at luncheon, his flow of spirits as he approached Ernsford Court, his triumphant look when, on their arrival, he left her in the gallery, and walked quickly away to see something that he supposed had been done to the stables — all this, with its one transparent object, was touchingly characteristic of the small but well-disposed nature, whose smallness had been the leading, though not the only cause of its owner's errors. And the pathos was not diminished by the semi-ludicrous, serio-comic resemblance of this simple stratagem to the one he had practised three years before, and his equal incapacity either to see, foresee, distinguish, avert, or leave alone. It chanced, however, that none of these five things were then required of him — Rupert being at that

moment in Cadogan Place, marvelling at Miss Twinbriggles.

While Mr. Grahame was hastening away, to amuse himself by looking about out of doors for the repairs and restorations that were going on within doors, Constance stood in the old gallery, doubting which was the most objectionable of the two objectionable courses that lay open to her—to remain, or run after her father.

But the suspense was of short duration: she had not been left alone two minutes when Lord Elfintower entered the room.

His face was pale, with a shadow-tint over it; and he moved slowly. Constance was startled by the change in him, and said involuntarily:

“Are you ill?”

He looked at her with a smile that did not extend beyond the lips that formed it.

They were standing under the painted window at the east end of the gallery — where they had stood three years before, when Constance had ridden from Moorfield at seven o'clock in the morning.

"I can't deny it — I *am* ill!" he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"But what are you doing about it?" asked Constance anxiously.

"I have seen the doctor, and he gave me some medicine and ordered me abroad," answered Lord Elfintower, in a tone which showed how little benefit he expected from either remedy. "He did all he could for me: there is nothing more to be done."

"Nothing more to be done? What do you mean?" she exclaimed, the whole truth flashing across her mind.

"There is nothing more to be done," he replied. "Nothing can be done for me, except a very little patching up for a very short time. . . . But seeing you here is a

very great pleasure. I was just going to write a note to ask you if you would come, as . . . . as I had better not go to Moorfield."

Constance turned her head away, to hide the tears which the strongest efforts of a strong will could not restrain. Lord Elfintower took her hand, gently led her to a chair near the painted window at the east end of the gallery, and sitting down opposite to her, said :

"Do you remember speaking to me—standing on this spot, three years and a quarter ago? You came here alone at the risk of being cruelly misinterpreted—even by those whose best interests you were trying to serve. You exerted yourself afterwards for the same object, to your own disadvantage: you even did so at the last hour—the last moment when it could have availed to do so. I know that you did this—for truth, bearing its own im-

press, often percolates unpeopled space, and reaches those whom it concerns. I know this: I know what I myself witnessed on this spot. I wished to tell you how deeply I feel and have felt it ever since — how immeasurably I value it and you; therefore I was resolved, if possible, to see you before I leave England for — the last time."

Constance was silent for a few seconds, and her features were clouded over by an expression not seen on them for more than three years — an expression of dim, hopeless despondency.

At length she said in a tone that corresponded with the temporary expression of her countenance: "I will not deny that my intentions were good — at least as far as I understand *them* or *anything*; but I *did* nothing — or *if* anything, an injury. Perhaps if I had not assured you so positively ——"

"It would have made no difference," said Lord Elfintower. "It must have come to what it did come to—you know it must. You have nothing to reproach yourself with: you did everything that feeling, energy and judgment could do—more than I could have imagined to be possible, even from you, from whom I expected much."

"No," she replied, in a sad but less gloomy tone. "I might perhaps have succeeded in preventing. . . . I ought to have struggled to remain at Carlsbad. I ought to have told my father what I ought to have foreseen——"

"What you could not have foreseen," said Lord Elfintower. "I was to return in less than a week from the day you left. . . . I could say much more on the subject, and prove to you how rightly you acted; but I cannot do so now, for I have something very important to say; and my

opportunities now are few and uncertain. So that I only ask you now to accept an unbiased testimony — the testimony of . . . ”

“ Of what ? ” said Constance, alarmed by a dim apprehension.

“ There is no time to lose,” he answered hurriedly. “ Your father will be here presently ; and what remains to be said is of terrible importance.”

“ But of what ? ” she repeated ; “ the testimony of what ? ”

“ The testimony of a dying man,” he answered, after a momentary hesitation. “ I shall never (as I firmly believe) return to England alive. I have suffered as much as has sufficed to ruin a very sound constitution and a muscular frame. I am very weary of the struggle, and (please God!) have little to regret — for myself abstractedly, nothing : but I am anxious about Rupert — inexpressibly anxious.”

Constance involuntarily averted her head:



the conscious blush of womanhood mantled in her cheek for an instant, and died away in fluctuating paleness: meanwhile he was scrutinising her countenance.

"Constance! I ask you to influence him," he said, slowly and distinctly, after watching her for a minute or two.

She averted her head still more: the colour again mantled in her cheek: she answered in a low tremulous voice:

"I would give my life for you: I will attempt anything you ask me to do: but I wish it were something that I have the power to do. . . . I have no power to do what you ask."

"You have, if you wish to have it: I mean — if you wish it for his sake," said he. "You have — or will have, if you have not already. . . . And of this I am sure: No influence but yours will make him what is in him to be. I should not have ventured to say so much, were it not

that your countenance seems to tell me . . . that I may do so."

"Don't . . . don't tell him," she said, in an agitated voice. "Don't let him be induced by ——"

"I leave it—I leave *him* to you alone," he answered solemnly. "I say nothing on the subject to anyone but yourself—nothing more to you . . . except one thing—to warrant my impression. Do I judge rightly? Do your own feelings go with . . . go beyond the actual words of my request? Do you accept . . . it . . . in the sense I mean?"

"I do:" answered Constance, with a sudden firmness of voice and manner that lasted out the words, but did not outlast them. "I so understand and accept it."

She paused, and, as if entranced, appeared to forget the things around—so translucently her eyes gazed at something beyond the visible world. Lord Elfintower

watched her in silence: a melancholy smile came over his countenance slowly—almost furtively, as a thing that was a stranger there. He bent over her, kissed her forehead reverently, and said, in a voice of strong emotion:

“God bless you, Constance!”

She looked up, and her countenance changed instantaneously. The ideal scene had vanished: the present scene, and the things it immediately represented—struggles, sufferings, wasted affections, unavailable power, premature death—was there before her, horribly distinct.

She shuddered as she contemplated the two pictures in juxtaposition, and said, “But why do you give yourself up? It was not so when I last saw you in London . . . a week ago.”

“It was only a question of time,” answered Lord Elfintower. Perhaps “I hastened it by coming to England, or ——”

“But what does the doctor say? or why will you not try another? several — every-one in London?”

“They could only say the same as he does — the same that I knew before I went to him. When WILL comes into unnatural antagonism with the best and strongest feelings of one’s nature, the two warring spirits of good and evil, whose constant attendance I, at least, can recognise in my own personal experience, mingle in the strife, and bring the soul and the body to a collision so violent that one or other must deteriorate rapidly and at length, lose its vital force. During my last few hours at Carlsbad, my efforts at self-repression were made to the extremest extent of overstrained endurance, and so excessive was the effort, that I broke down physically three days afterwards at Cologne. A sound constitution carried me through this; and when I arrived in England, three months

ago, I was, or seemed to be, as well as when I left it two years and a half before. I was three months in London—it could not be avoided; three months, day by day, hour by hour . . . meeting her continually, and . . . in fact I have broken down finally.”

“But how?” said Constance hurriedly, as if impelled to ask for the answer that she feared to hear.

“If,” he replied, “you misuse the works of a watch, it will, after a time, get out of order, and at length cease to go at all. The action of my heart has been increased to an unnatural rate by an irremoveable cause, and violently repressed by WILL: the result is—that it has been disordered past recovery, and will soon stop altogether.”

“God help us all!” exclaimed Constance, bursting into tears. “This tempts one horribly to say that the world is hopelessly bad—that nothing good can live and be happy in it. Please God, I *do* not and *will*

not think so: but it tempts one Satanically to murmur—even while it reproves one perceptibly for doing so. Edgar! you know not what a bitter trial this is to me in every way.” She fastened her veil tightly under her chin, and left the gallery. Soon afterwards she was riding with her father back to Moorfield—solemnly ratifying in her own heart the solemn promise she had just made.

And Rupert was making an ass of himself in Cadogan Place.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

BUT mortal diseases, like other human liabilities, sometimes deviate inexplicably from their ordinary course. Lord Elfintower, instead of becoming worse, grew rapidly better—so much and so rapidly that, in less than a week from the day of Constance's visit, he was on horseback during the greater part of three successive days, transacted business afterwards till eleven o'clock at night, and rose the following morning capable and vigorous as on his return to London three months before.

Rupert was still in London, but was expected to arrive the next day. Mrs. Grahame minutely inquired after Lord

Elfintower's health, and conducted herself ambiguously.

It was one of the last days in July—a summer's afternoon of peculiar, rare and local beauty; a day such as provincial England has localised. The unruffled atmosphere was full of rich warmth. Harmony of sound dwelt in the air—the *Te Deum* of inanimate nature; harmony odour rose up of freshened from the shower-sprinkled earth—the incense of the vegetable world. And the bees hummed their pleasant monotone in the cottage gardens; and the raven wing of the past thunder cloud, tinged by the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, threw a dark blue mist over the distant meadow.

A day such as England has localised. A day analogous to the character and history of her people—analogous in respect of the raven thunder cloud that hung with uncertain aspect at the edge of the powerful



and steady sunshine before which it slowly melted from the sight—of the bees that gathered their honey in the cottage gardens — of the birds that twittered on the pearl-dropping hedge-rows, in unconscious but full assurance against the cloud of uncertain aspect.

A day of strong existence; a day imbued with life; a day that quadruples sensation; a day when colouring is richly mellow, and lines are imperceptibly shaded into becoming forms; a day of still and mysterious beauty, that spiritualises, and, in spiritualising, strengthens all legitimate human feelings and passions; a day when physical and æsthetical intensity act and react with increased power.

Lord Elfintower had just returned from a long ride, and was sitting down to write some letters in the gallery, when a well-known figure passed on horseback through the park, within a hundred and fifty yards

of the west window; and soon afterwards Mr. Grahame entered the room with an elastic tread.

"Well, my boy, and how *are* you?" said he. "They told me you were ever so ill since I saw you—I'm afraid that's ten days ago, for I've been away—but I thought somehow that you were made of stronger stuff."

"You were right," answered Lord Elfin-tower, with an emphasis that was unintentionally significant. "Rumour shows as much acquisitiveness now as in the days of Dido."

"Well, yes; I suppose it does:" said Mr. Grahame. "But I don't recollect much about Virgil; I only remember something of one or two passages that I was flogged about. Well, but here you are in the old gallery, as usual. . . . There's one thing—it's big enough, eh?"

"I am very fond of the room," answered

Lord Elfintower, changing colour as he pronounced the words. "I like it, and the views from it . . . and I have a fancy, too, for a large room, if it has no other furniture than a broken chair and a hair trunk."

"That can't be said of this room . . . and I see you're making some additions, too," said Mr. Grahame, looking about. "All in the same style, too, eh? That's right. . . . Well, I must be off now — I'm very much pushed for time. But Jemima was very anxious to hear how you were. She made a point of my coming to see; and she's waiting till I go back, before she answers an invitation to stay next week at Perrington. Good-bye."

Back he rode to Moorfield, and made his report to Jemima, who thanked him with much feeling, and accepted the invitation to Perrington.

"Is there anything else I can do for

you, Jemima?" said he, exuberantly satisfied with the pleasant manner in which affairs seemed to have settled themselves down.

"Nothing else, my love," answered Jemima. "Has Rupert returned?"

"God bless me! I forgot to ask," said Mr. Grahame. "I thought there was something I had forgotten. He *was* to return to-day, I believe."

"By-the-bye," said Mrs. Grahame, as she directed the note, "there *is* one thing you can do. Can you spare a groom and horse from the stable, to ride over to Perringston with this?"

"To be sure," he answered, in a sprightly tone, carrying off the note. "Let me see," he thought, as he went to the stables; "there's Gypsy . . . she's quite sound now, and wants gentle exercise. She can go there across the fields very well. . . . She's a monstrous good-hearted woman

really ; she didn't mean any harm at Carlsbad — not a bit of it."

When solitude is inclosed within a large space of wall and roof, it ceases to be a negative idea, and grows into a positive existant — a twin self — with whom self-commune shapes itself into words and sequent sentences.

Lord Elfintower remained in the gallery, but did not resume his letter-writing. He ordered another horse to be ready in half an hour, and meanwhile stood by one of the south windows, dreamily looking at the terraces and distant woods — his thoughts arranging themselves into words, in the following sequence :

"I marvel at this recovery. Practically I am nearly as well as I was three years ago — at least I can do, and continue to do, as much, without being the worse for it. . . . Partial loss of mind, it is said, restores to the body the health which its sorrows

have impaired ; and it may be, that although I can understand and manage the affairs of this estate, yet the faculty of intense sensation may be worn out by the continual grinding of restraint, and the unsensuous body left to its lightened work.

“Not so. The idea brings its own refutation : it pictures a state of being that is not mine. The more I look at and compare it, the more I recognise the dissimilarity. I would it were true ? No. That would be the worst thing that could befall me — as the alternative which God rejects always is. If I die, I bequeath my legitimate hopes to Him ; but if I live in a state of æsthetical numbness, unsensuous and consequently unsympathising, I am a mischievous deception, credited for what I have been.

“But in what state am I ? Never was the vague sensation of capacity for distinct sensation more vivid than now ; never was the faculty of enjoyment more intense, or

the craving for it more acute — never the appreciation of happiness stronger, or the consciousness of life more vigorous. And, though disappointment encircles all these capacities, impossibility continuously drones her weary monotone, and recent trials have gone far to crush endurance itself by its own force, hope still exists abstractedly, and I am as I was before I returned to England. I know not what this can mean, unless ——”

His thoughts ceased to flow in sequent words and sentences; they were pictured before him. He looked at the south terraces, where Edith had played when a child — at the woods beyond, where he used to gather anemones and blue-bells to garland her golden hair — at the distant meadows, where the past thunder-cloud of uncertain aspect still hung raven-black above the line of dark blue mist. He looked at the far distance, where, under the

raven-black cloud, an expanse of clear light seemed to stretch out indefinitely beyond the horizon; and he longed for the rest which it typified. But even that involuntary prayer had a dual object — even in that momentary spirit-voyage Edith was ideally present.

He gazed without noting time, and as he gazed, the cloud of uncertain aspect became ideally more raven-black than before — the light beyond more translucent, and both approached by invisible motion: he gazed yet longer, and the ideal presence of Edith grew into a portrait, whose life-like resemblance made his pulses quicken, as he had thought they never would have quickened again: he gazed yet longer, and, in the unnoted time, the portrait grew indistinct, as it were the shadow of something near: it was the ideal reflection — the spirit-shadow of Edith herself.

At the warning of the spirit-shadow, he

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involuntarily turned his eyes towards a door at the east end of the gallery, and saw Edith enter. She paused an instant ere she closed the door; then came forward with a nervous but even step, and stood before him — her eyes heavily undershadowed — her cheeks passion-paled.

Lord Elfintower remained where he had stood, and watched her silently with eyes that looked black by position—so colourless had his face become. Thus passed a few seconds — seconds fancy-stretched into hours by the intolerable silence. Edith spoke first in a low voice, which so quivered with repressed intensity, that articulation was well-nigh lost in its vibrations: her hand trembled with such violence that it could scarcely hold her riding-whip: her rich brown eyelashes drooped heavily over her eyes, which she seemed unable to raise from the floor.

“You shudder at the sight of me,” she

said; "I deserve and expected it. I have been the blight of your life — it matters not how. I am wrong, perhaps, in coming here — certainly the world, without exception, would condemn me for coming, and will condemn me, for it cannot but be known that I have come; yet I would not act otherwise — for I *could* not. Edgar! I have destroyed the happiness that I should and could have, formed; it matters not how it happened; I am answerable for it; I bear its punishment — and God only knows what that is! I turn from my own self with a shudder; but I heard that you had been ill — I knew not how ill: I only heard it to-day — it was kept from me. . . . I mounted the old pony and came here alone. . . . I tied him to the box of a tree. . . . I feared you were . . . really ill; and, whatever the alternative, I *must* have come."

A groan of concentrated anguish burst

from Lord Elfintower's lips ; he could only repress articulation.

Edith half raised her eyes for an instant, and dropped them again ; their lashes seemed to have grown darker — they were damp and matted with the tears that welled but did not overflow. Another intolerable silence succeeded : they stood fronting each other — a living picture of human woe. At length she looked up, and said with sudden vehemence :

“Edgar ! I have come, because I can bear the burden no longer. I care not for opinion or reputation ; I care only that you should know the truth. Edgar ! say what you will, when I have said it ; despise me — hate me — throw off your own nature, and heap upon me every imprecation that a self-condemning conscience ever yet clung to as a refuge from its own greater reproaches ; disbelieve everything else but this one thing — that I have never loved any

man but yourself. Folly, vanity, misapprehension, weakness,—I know not what,—set me blindfold on a course that wrecked my happiness before I knew whither it tended; but I do not excuse myself—I do not ask for excuses—I only ask you to believe this one thing. If you never listen to the sound of my voice again—if you turn from the very recollection of it with abhorrence, I implore you to hear and believe me when I tell you that it was not fickleness—that I never changed my mind—that it was anything else, however wicked—anything conceivable except that. I have never, never loved . . . any man but you.”

She tottered, rather than walked, to a sofa that stood a few paces off; and sinking down upon it, burst into such a passion of weeping, that her whole frame was convulsed by its violence.

A position so terrible as Lord Elfin-

tower's can scarcely be conceived abstractedly: it was one of downright agony—a struggle in torture. Before him, and so near that her breath almost fanned his cheek as he involuntarily bent over her, lay the idol of his whole life, writhing in a paroxysm of grief that was his own—sorrowing in hopeless solitude of heart. Writhing, sorrowing, struggling—struggling with anguish intolerable and enduring,—struggling with herself;—yet even more lovely than when he had wooed and won her in that gallery three years before—more lovely by reason of developed womanhood—more lovely by reason of present suffering; he saw her within half a pace of himself, who had never loved her with more entireness and intensity than at that moment—he saw her, as beautiful a created thing as ever made virtue ineffably delicious or sin deceptively attractive.

“O God! this is greater than I can

bear," were the words that burst from his lips, in spite of every effort to repress them.

At the sound of his voice she raised her head very slightly, and stretched forward her hand, but so little that the movement might have been accidental. He took it, held it from him for an instant, and then pressed it to his lips with a suppressed passionateness that faintly indicated the awful struggle within.

"You . . . you believe me?" she said.  
"You believe that I have never——"

"I do;" he replied in a voice that was barely articulate: "I do; would to God I did not!"

"And you ——" she added in a very low tone—"you have never . . .?"

"It is terribly true," he answered, speaking rather to himself than to her.

For the first time since she had entered the gallery, Edith raised her eyes to his;

then dropped them with a shiver, half raised them again, and rose to her feet—her hand still in his.

“Terribly true,” she repeated after him in a hurried manner, but with an emphasis which showed that her mind coloured the words with its own predominant idea. “Terribly true . . . I am so utterly miserable that life is a burden; so hopelessly wretched that I care not what becomes of me in the horrible solitariness of my present life. I see nothing in it but despair—despair here and hereafter. I cannot answer for myself in such a life: it grows more and more dreadful. Nothing can be so awful—so wicked as this state: for I cannot believe in Providence, though I would. I am drifting to perdition because I am so wretched that I cannot think. My mind is distorted by it; I shall go mad—mad from total despair—despair that I cannot avert or dispel. I shall go mad, and

know that I am so; and no one else will know it; mad with the solitary consciousness of being so—mad, yet accountable . . . and this when I would give up everything that this world could afford me the power of giving, for you . . . when I would live in a desert, work as a slave in a swamp—and thank God for it during every waking moment, with an intensity of gratitude that none but myself can conceive. Edgar! will you abandon me to my despair? The moment is too solemn—too awful for reserve. Edgar! Edgar! you say that I am as dear to you as ever: then save me while you can!”

She sank upon her knees, still holding his hand with a grasp so imbued with passionate despair, that it became bloodless-white with the pressure of her fingers. He raised her gently; but the arm that did so might singly have lifted her entirely from the ground, with force to spare—so positively



does intenseness of feeling quadruple physical strength. He raised her with the reverential gentleness which the love of woman inspires most where the nature is most noble.

He passed his left hand across his eyes, as if to shut out from his mind the horrible confusion of influences that almost made his will pause in uncertainty.

"Edith!" he said, in a hollow voice: "help me! help us both! for the sake of us both. . . ."

He bent over her, and gently tried to disengage her hand: it clung to his with a drowning clutch. She looked up—and her look of passionate despair made him shudder, even amid that tempest of emotion. Her face was the colour of an exhumed marble statue; her eyes wore a mixed expression of misery and tenderness that made his brain reel and his convictions totter.

"Do you cast me from you?" she said in so low a tone that he caught her meaning by perception, rather than heard it. "Will you leave me without a hope or a guide? Have you ceased to love me? Will you tear from me my last—my only hope?"

Paler and paler she grew: her eyes seemed gradually to lose the power of seeing definitely, the hand that clasped his leant heavily.

"Edith! Edith!" he exclaimed, literally trembling in every nerve: "for God's sake save us from ourselves!"

She did not hear him; her hand leaned more heavily, and its grasp relaxed; she was sinking to the ground, helpless from emotion. He bent forward to support her; and the once idolized golden tress, whose perfume recalled the past in all the vividness of present reality, touched his cheek. A shiver of poisoned joy passed through

him as he supported her in his arms, and for an instant wavered before the tremendous trial. Edith trembled so violently that he could feel the vibration as he supported her. She turned her head towards him, and murmured :

“I am yours now and for ever.”

He started at the sound, as though he had awakened from a dream ; and then for the space of a few seconds, the conflict within him was the greatest that he had yet undergone — so great that the limits of human endurance forbade its being one second longer undecided.

It was decided by a final exertion of will, such as well-nigh embodied all that he had put forth since his second arrival at Carlsbad, and yet was no more than sufficient for the required work of supporting them both. He raised her gently, withdrew his arm, and stepped back a pace. She stood before him as though mesmerised,

whilst in a firm voice that vibrated unnaturally, he said :

"Edith! you must help to save us from ourselves. You *must*, for the sake of our immense love: you *must*, or that immense and beautiful love will lose its beauty and its infinitude. With my whole heart and soul, with the utmost strength of earthly passion, and the utmost strength of spiritual intensity, I love you! That love is interwoven with every interest, here and hereafter: the force of my entire nature is in it: But we *must* accept the trial that we brought on ourselves."

"Not we. I—I only," said Edith, solemnly. Her voice was steady, but not like her own. She stood like one spell-bound: it was as if a statue had spoken.

"Both, in a degree," he replied. "I might—I ought to have persisted."

"Noble, beyond all other living men!" said Edith, still erect and motionless.

"Both of us—both," he repeated. "It is so; and I would rather bear a part in that which concerns both—concerns us for now and for hereafter. Edith! for the sake of our immense love, let us accept the trial, and trustfully leave the infinite future to Him who created all beauty as a link between earth and heaven."

He paused. Edith turned, and left the room; or rather glided from it, like a spectre. She spoke not a word; her eyes were tearless; breathing and pulsation seemed suspended.

Some time afterwards (how long is not known) a carriage drove into the courtyard, and Rupert sprang out of it.

"He's in, I suppose," said he, glancing at the horse that was being led up and down.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "the horse has been waiting these two hours, and more."

Unaccountably seized by a sudden panic, Rupert bounded into the house, and went at once into the gallery. He found his brother fallen forwards from his chair, without any apparent sign of life—his right arm stretched stiffly across the writing-table, his hand clasping a woman's glove.

## CHAPTER XIX.

RUPERT lifted him up, and carried him to his bedroom, where for many hours he lay on a sofa, apparently dead.

Several London physicians were telegraphed for, and they found on their arrival two doctors from Tedminster already there ; but for some days none could predict the result.

With protracted exhaustion, and a general giving way of the pulses on the one hand, and a fine constitution on the other, his life hung in the balance for nearly three weeks, susceptible to a feather's weight.

He did survive ; and the doctors thought that change of climate might benefit him,

if he recovered sufficiently to live through the journey; but they said that ultimate recovery was impossible.

Nature, however, did rather more than they had expected, and by the end of September he was able to travel—that is, he was not much worse than when he had first crawled to the doctor's house in London. One of the Tedminster doctors saw him start, and remarked, with a grim smile—

“There goes a plucky one!”

“And the best master that ever was,” added the old butler, with tears in his eyes.

As the travelling carriage passed the gate leading from the parish road into the meadows that lay between it and the green lane, Lord Elfintower turned involuntarily, to take a last look towards Moorfield, which was just visible among the surrounding trees. He saw no one, but he was seen by two people who, unknown to him or to each other, were there for the purpose.



One was Constance, who had set out alone on the old pony, and was waiting within the gate, almost concealed by the hedgerow: she had not seen him since her long interview with him in the gallery—the doctors having forbidden his seeing any one except his brother, who had never left him for a moment.

The other was Edith, who had delayed her departure from Moorfield week after week. She had walked alone by another and a longer way, and crawled into the copse on the other side of the gate, where she had lain concealed more than an hour.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE sisters returned as they came. They did not meet till late in the day, and then in the presence of others.

The next morning Edith left Moorfield.

Time passed there most uneventfully after she was gone.

Lord Sevenoaks, still unconscious of competition, continued with mild persistency his very sincere addresses to Constance, who continued with strong persistency to repel him without letting him feel that she was doing so. Thus passed the time till the middle of November, when Mrs. Grahame, being an economist of time and

money, albeit largely possessed of both, set off for London in search of "bargains."

Constance accompanied her mother; but, being neither a suitable companion nor a good discoverer of bargains, her presence became a weariness, and would have been cheerfully dispensed with, but that indoors, every article of furniture containing the materials for amusement or instruction was tightly bound up in brown holland, and without, all was fog and empty houses.

On the fourth day of the ten to be passed in London, Mrs. Grahame, having got wind of some table-cloths and a green-house stove on sale somewhere at Notting-hill, steered her course in that direction soon after twelve o'clock. At or about the spot where Tyburn turnpike once stood, Mrs. Grahame thus broke silence:

"Nothing like London in October and November for bargains. . . . But you shouldn't admire the things out loud before

them—it makes them ask more. Suppose you take a walk in Kensington Gardens, and I'll call for you. I shall only be about half an hour."

These propositions (I use the word both in its primary and secondary meaning) were agreed to, and Constance was let out at the gate.

It was one of those exceptional days that, in late autumn and early winter, make London a pleasant place of sojourn within the limits of what is called "a clergyman's week;" a day with a mild but not vaporous air, a subdued but clear light, and a breeze just strong enough to remove any lurking atmospherical adulterations eastward beyond the vicinity of the parks; a day of distinct images, when the eye takes in the whole of St. James's Street in detail, and the outline of the old palace is well-defined, and the Surrey hills beyond look dark blue, with an edge of yellowish

white light — when all the events that were hotly massed into the space of a few weeks and overbuilt acres, seem to vibrate gently in the air — and scenes long passed rise up before the mind's eye in purer colouring: a day when one remembers that there is a country outside, and that Oxford Street was once called "y° waye to Oxford."

But when images grow more distinct, those who see and feel them grow more self-exacting — the mind that is incapable of the one being incapable of the other. Therefore, as Constance strolled through Kensington Gardens, revolving in her mind the past, present and imaginable future of herself and the three people whose fate was to her as her own, she revolved simultaneously every possible combination of circumstances, other than what had occurred, reproached herself with not having done all she could to produce them, and very

seriously entertained the idea that she was of less use in her generation than the host of lady-workers in Berlin wool and gossip.

There is no discontent so overwhelming as that of a high-toned mind reproaching itself with the omission of something impossible. The barrier is felt, but not recognised; and its contact brings closer the supposed possible.

In this frame of mind she walked on, without taking note of the distance or direction, till, in about twenty minutes, she found herself close to the piece of water near the Palace. As she was turning to walk back, in order to be near the gate by the time that her mother should call for her, her attention was arrested by a sight sufficiently common in Kensington Gardens—a pretty child. The child, a boy about five years old, did not differ remarkably from other children who were playing in the Gardens: he was a pretty

child, and nothing more ; but he was picturesquely dressed, and his attitudes were sufficiently graceful, by reason of their pure childishness, to interest an artistic mind not definitely occupied at the moment.

But soon her attention was further arrested, and in a manner more exciting, if less agreeable. The child began amusing himself by swinging to and fro a bough that overhung the water. That amusement would seem a dangerous one ; but as nearly every child who plays there does the same thing whenever he is not being scolded in anticipation of his doing so, and as the rate of infant mortality is not affected thereby, analogy went to infer that this particular one was safe — as he would have been but for the anxiety of his nurse, who came running up, breathless and rubicund, exclaiming, “ Law ! bless the child ! ” and, shaking the branch out of his hand, fairly jerked him into the water.

The wind was blowing inshore, and Constance standing so near, that, not losing her presence of mind, she was able, by kneeling on the grass, and stretching out her right arm, to seize his frock as he rose to the surface, and drag him to the bank, where, with the exception of a mouthful and noseful of water, which he resented by roaring lustily and slapping the nurse when she tried to lift him up, he showed no symptom of being inconvenienced by his ducking.

Constance, taking a practical view of the case, recommended a speedy return and change of clothes ; but her advice was unheeded, by reason of the child's continuous and persistent roaring, which evidently proceeded neither from injury nor fright, but from anger only : perceiving which, and seeing the stout nurse settle the point by carrying him off, in defiance of roars and slaps, she turned to retrace her steps, when



her attention was arrested by two new comers arriving from opposite directions.

The first was a beautiful woman, whose face was unfamiliar, but not unknown to Constance. She was so far like the child, that the latter resembled her in the colour of his eyes when he was angry; but the question of their relationship was cleared up by his ceasing to roar as soon as she appeared, and her catching him up in her arms, regardless of the water and mud that covered his clothes.

The second was Mrs. Grahame, who needs not to be described.

After the first ebullition of feeling, the strange lady made a few hurried inquiries of the nurse, and then, walking quickly towards Constance, said:

"I have no words to express the gratitude I feel. I wish I were able to show it. Oh! if ever I have the opportunity ——"

"You can't have," said Mrs. Grahame, approaching as rapidly as her actual proportions would allow.

There was a short pause. The strange lady coloured, and, after hesitating for a moment or two, took the child by the hand, and walked away.

Mrs. Grahame was meanwhile recovering what the attendants at vapour baths call the "*respiratory* organs —" which done, she took up her sentence where she had left off, thus :

"... have an idea what a walk I've had after you. The sale is not till to-morrow; it seems—so provoking! So I had to come back at once. Who's that? you shouldn't let people talk to you in that sort of way—you can't tell who they are: I daresay she's not respectable. And your sleeve is all wet . . . and muddy too. What have you been about? Come along: we've time to get to Wardour Street before luncheon."

Constance blushed as she gave the following succinct account of her own good deed :

"The child tumbled into the water: I was standing close to him, and pulled him out."

"Well, my dear," answered Mrs. Grahame, "it was very good and brave of you—I'm sure I should never have had the courage to do it. I'm glad she's gone, though," added Mrs. Grahame, increasing her speed, and looking back rather nervously. "I was afraid she was going to scrape acquaintance with one: and it's an awkward thing to shake a person off after that sort of thing."

Constance made no reply, and the subject dropped. They walked on in silence to the gate, got into the carriage, and drove to, or rather to the corner of, Wardour Street.

"We'll get out here," observed Mrs. Grahame. "They always charge more if one drives up. Do you know, I think you

had better stay in the carriage. . . . *I* put on a shabby old shawl on purpose."

In about half an hour Mrs. Grahame emerged from the long street where carved oak and bad smells dwell together in ill-assorted union. They drove back homewards. As they turned into Bond Street, Mrs. Grahame said half aloud to herself:

"An odd meeting . . . Hm—m—m, forty-five and three, forty-eight—rubbed up and sent—Hm—m—m.—Very handsome, eh!"

"Very handsome," said Constance, whose mind was still in Kensington Gardens.

"What—the wardrobe?" ejaculated Mrs. Grahame. "But how did you see it? you didn't get out."

"I thought you meant the lady in Kensington Gardens, as you spoke of an odd meeting," said Constance.

"Lord bless me, no!" answered Mrs. Grahame, who had almost forgotten the

circumstance. "I met Lord Rossden in one of the shops in Wardour Street—that was all."

"I have seen her face before," said Constance: "and I remember how and where. It was last July at Molini's Studio in a sketch: she is the original."

"Why, of course, she's a model," said Mrs. Grahame, with a short conclusive laugh; "and she can't be respectable, for they pay the models two shillings a day—and how can she dress as she does upon that?"

Constance did not think that her mother had exactly hit the right nail on the head; but she was no better informed herself, and had no clear ideas on the subject. By this time they arrived in Grosvenor Square.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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